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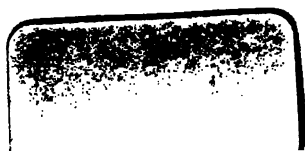


JOHN W. YOES

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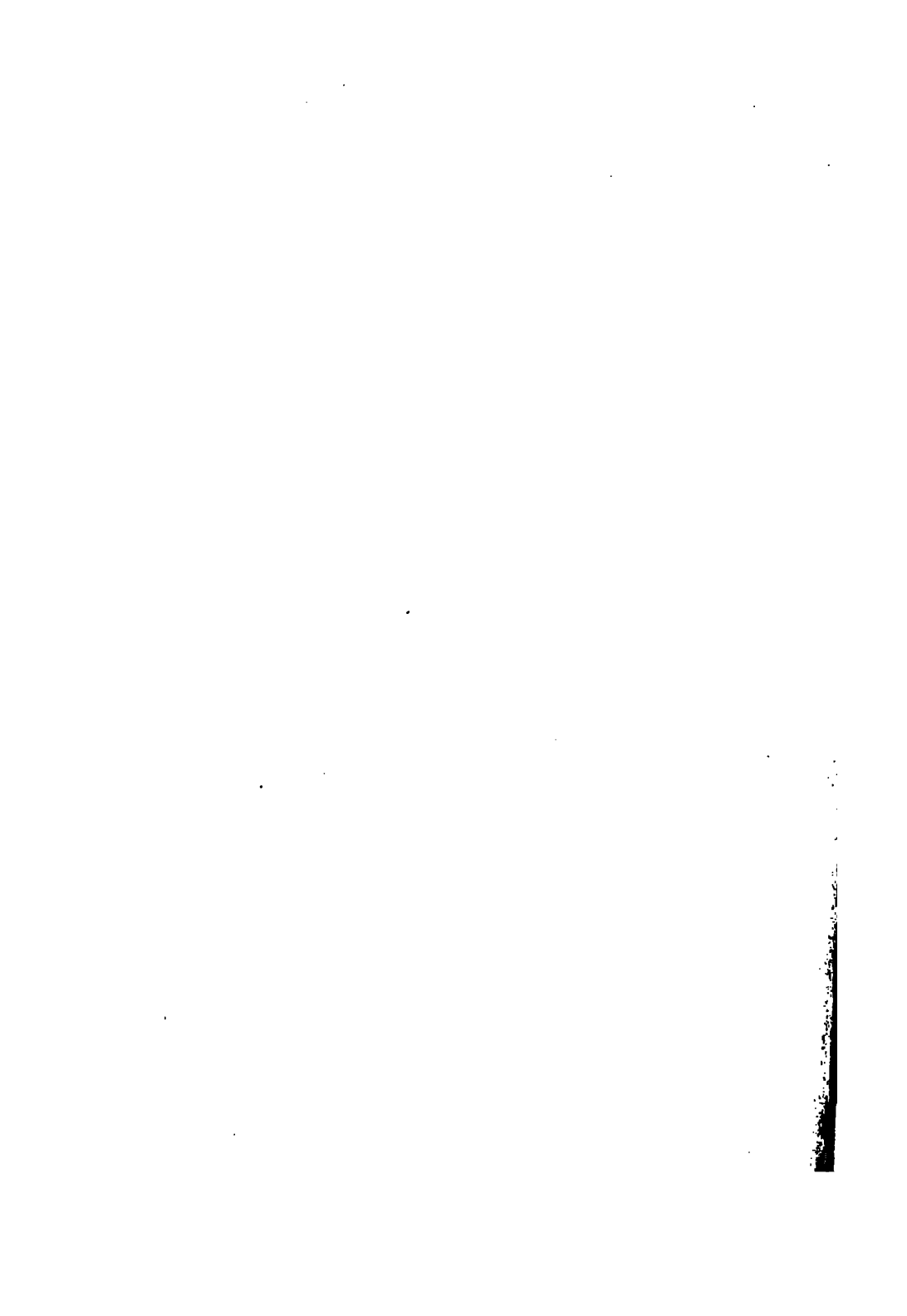
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"TO THE EAST THE GARRISON REARED ITS WHITE AND RED BUILDINGS,
THEIR SLATE ROOFS GLEAMING DULLY IN THE SOFT RAYS OF AMBER LIGHT."
PAGE 296.

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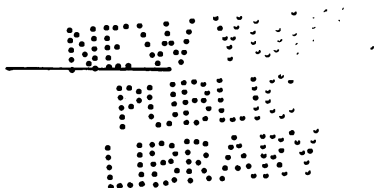
JACK BRAINARD

A Romance of the Cherokee Hills

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BY
JOHN W^Y YOES

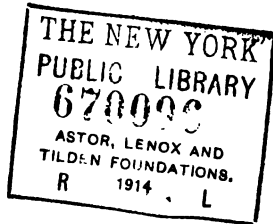
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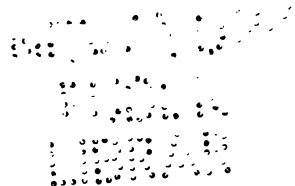
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JOHN W. YOE
1904
YOE

TO
Col. G. A. A. Deane,
WHOSE UNIVERSAL KINDNESS
AND
FRANK GENEROSITY
ENDEARS HIM TO ALL THAT KNOW HIM
THIS VOLUME
IS GRATEFULLY AND ADMIRINGLY INSCRIBED.



Same, Dec. 1/13. \$1.00

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PREFACE

THE scene of this story is laid in and around Fort Gibson, Indian Territory, one of the most beautiful and romantic spots west of the Mississippi. Rich in historic and legendary lore the Garrison is known throughout the land. Here it was that Sam Houston sought repose among the children of the forest; Washington Irving came to dream of his lovely Matilda and to write his "Tour of the Prairies." These were the days of the keel boat and the pirogue, the Osage and the buffalo.

Let memory turn backward for a moment and feast its mind's eye upon the scene as it was in the days of the wiley Black Fox and his brother scouts, Double Jack, Wood Pecker Jo, Good Dollar Youngbird, Tal-Mar-Fix-Eco, Kingfisher Jim, Ok-la-Bis-Ge-Ha-Jo, and Co-Wet-A-Ha-Jo, then you will revel in Arcadian simplicity and primeval grandeur.

One had but to read the treaty stipulations between the United States Government and the Cherokee Nation of Indians to evolve the story of the mythical "Yellow Plume," for there it is written and recorded with tears and heart burnings on the part of the red man and with cold, brutal indifference on that of the government. Yet the

same heroic spirit that was to be found in the hearts of John Ross, Kelechulee, Jno. Baldrige, Ooclenota, Edward Gunter, Situwakee and others, whose names are found appended to the "Constitution formed at New Echota in July, 1827," burns brightly in the bosoms of their descendants, and to day they are laying the corner stone of a state that will outrival the one east of the Mississippi which, on the 19th day of December, 1829, set aside their laws as "null and void," and drove the Cherokees from the homes of their fathers.

THE AUTHOR.

JACK BRAINARD

CHAPTER I

JACK BRAINARD walked along the banks of the winding Cherry Creek with bowed head. Listlessly he wandered down the little stream, and was lost to his surroundings.

That morning, he had gone to his office on Seventeenth Street with an eager look of expectancy in his eyes. Almost impatiently he had looked over the various letters addressed to him from the camp in Lost Gulch and numerous other places in the United States, but a look of disappointment settled upon his careworn face, and he arose as if a load were bearing down upon him.

"Warren," he said to a man seated by a desk in the office, "you may look after matters to-day as I shall not be here. I am expecting some of the men from the hills, so would advise you to stay pretty close, that you may not miss them."

"All right, Mr. Brainard, I shall be on the lookout," said Warren, as the tall form of his employer disappeared.

Jack Brainard was a man of business. Where he came from no one knew and none seemed to care. That he was a gentleman, was well known, since he was received in the best drawing-rooms of the capital and had access to all the clubs of the western metropolis. He had come from the little town of Victor, and opened an office in one of the skyscrapers. It was whispered that some mystery hung over him, but as the golden West was filled with that class of men, no pertinent questions were asked concerning him or his antecedents, so he moved along in the even tenor of his way.

This morning he was sad and preoccupied with thoughts which he kept locked tightly in his own bosom. Many of his acquaintances looked at him wonderingly as he passed them without a sign of recognition and continued his way down the bustling avenue, and sought the banks of the stream trickling along through the heart of the city.

Away to the west, the Rockies reared their silver-crested shafts until they mingled with the low-scudding patches of fleecy clouds. It was autumn and the winds blew chill from the Alp-like summits of the distant hills. Along the banks of Bear Creek Brainard could see the green fringe of timber, with the leaves purpling at the touch of approaching winter. Yet the myriad colors had no charm for him, for he was thinking, thinking of a letter which had gone to the middle East weeks since and which should have been answered before

this, but he would wait—yes wait, as he had waited for nearly twelve long years, until the tidings came, and then—well—he had not decided what he should do; it all depended on circumstances, but what mattered it to him any way, there was a certain hope even in the uncertainty of suspense which supplied his soul with a sustenance that could be found in no other source. Life to him was a fever—a fitful fever, and a few weeks would make but little difference, when he had waited for nearly a score of years. It was late in the afternoon when he again entered his room. He had wandered about all day; had lingered in the cool fern glens, and drank in the invigorating atmosphere as it swept down the cañons.

His heart was heavy and his words were few. "God in heaven," he thought, "can it be there is no end to this? Am I for all time to be a wanderer upon the face of the earth—exiled from the spot of my choice?" and he put his hands to his head as if to still the ceaseless throb of pain.

He had written a letter to one of his old-time friends; to one who had been with him in the halcyon days when all was peace, and when his heart was light with love for a maiden who made all his sunshine in that bygone time. He had lost her, and had gone away that no one might witness the mighty struggle which was to be his for months, years, aye, forever. No answer had come to him, and as a result his nerves were drawn to their

utmost tension, and the effects of the terrible suspense were perceptible to a casual observer.

"I will wait—wait," he muttered, as he threw himself across a couch and drifted into a restless slumber.

The next morning he went again to the office, but previous to the trip he had loitered with a party of friends in the rotunda of the Brown Palace, and smoked half a dozen cigars as if to gain strength for a fresh disappointment.

When he entered, Warren greeted him cheerily as he tossed his hat upon the desk and looked longingly at a mass of letters placed there for his perusal. Slowly he turned them one by one, and when he saw an unfamiliar postmark, his hand trembled; hurriedly he broke the seal. His eyes glittered with animation as he read, and his face became sad, while a tear trickled slowly down his furrowed cheek.

GARRISON HILL, *October 10th, 18-*

HON. JACK BRAINARD,
61 Seventeenth Street,
DENVER, COLO.

DEAR OLD FRIEND :

Wonders are never to cease. Your letter came as a message from the dead. It is almost more than I can keep, yet I shall remember the olden time, and your secret shall remain inviolate. Zounds, man! I'm more than glad that the rumors which drifted here some years ago are not true, and that you are

yet among the living. You ask me to tell you all the news. That is impossible, yet there are a few incidents that may be of interest, and with as much expediency as possible I will acquaint you with them.

The old "Garrison" is just as it used to be when we wandered about the place together. Nearly all the people who were here then have moved away or have been called to their home beyond the skies. I dare say that if you have changed so much, you could live here without the slightest fear of detection and that you could travel for miles and not meet with any one whom you formerly knew.

Brace yourself now, old man; I have been to see the place you mentioned, and find it can be purchased, as it is going under the hammer and will be sold in a few days. A fatality seems to have become attached to the home on the "Fourteen Mile," and to-day there's not so desolate a place anywhere in the hills. Vines and thorn-bushes have taken it; the roofs of the cabins have fallen in, and they are fit homes only for the bats and owls.

Dear friend, I have also to tell you that the lovely Constance is now wearing widow's weeds, and is living at the "Elms" with her mother, Mrs. Davidson. She is more beautiful than ever, and the melancholy of her face almost moves one to tears, still no word of complaint ever falls from her lips. She lives a very secluded life, seldom leaving her home even for a day. If you will send your agent here immediately and have him follow the inclosed list of instructions, you will be able to secure this old home without difficulty.

I will leave here in about ten days for a year or more of travel in the Orient, and should you return, you will know best how to manage your affairs. Your

old colored friend, Joe Waitie, is still living, as is Aunt Chloe, yet for years they have mourned you as dead.

Yours very sincerely,
Tom B——.

As the last words of the letter passed under the eyes of Brainard, he arose and walked to the window overlooking the street. He stood there for a long time, then turned to Warren, who was busy filing some papers in a large leather-bound book.

"Warren, you will please get ready for a trip East as soon as possible. I have very urgent business that you alone can attend to, so prepare to take the east-bound train at 7.05 this evening."

Warren was surprised, but without a word hurriedly left the office. This was not the first time he had been called upon to execute commissions of trust, and was therefore always ready for an emergency.

Brainard spent the day in getting everything in readiness for sending his solicitor on a journey concerning matters known only to himself. That evening he went with Warren to the station, and watched the long train of coaches as it drew out of the Union Station, and away over the glistening rails on its way to the East. Then returning to his lonely room he watched in silence the disappearing sun, while upon his face there rested a look of resolve which usurped the place of a certain expression of irresoluteness which had been there for weeks.

In a fortnight the faithful Warren returned, and

handed Brainard a package of papers which he scanned with critical eye, while a smile of satisfaction hovered about his lips. When he had completed this inspection, he said :

“ Warren, to-morrow I shall leave you for some months, possibly for years.”

“ By the way, Jack, is not this rather a sudden move ? ” queried Warren.

“ Yes, rather ; but the matter in hand is imperative, and no one can act as my substitute. You can look after everything here, and report. Be careful about my ward, and should she decide to come East, see that she is provided with everything, for I may not come back.”

Two days later, Brainard looked for the last time on the western hills, and turned his face to the East, whither he was going to begin a new life.

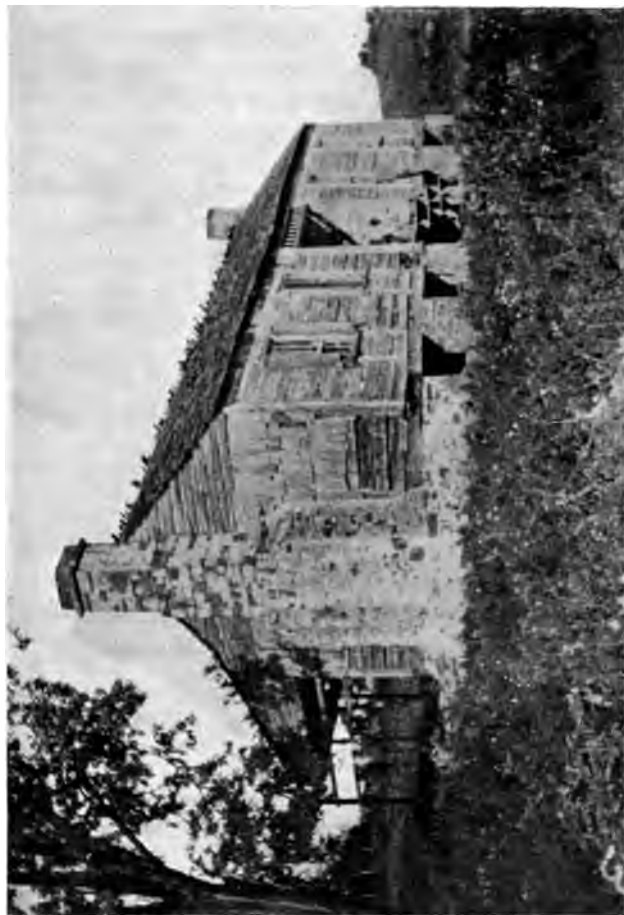
CHAPTER II

It was on the evening of the fourth day after Brainard left Denver that he found himself toiling up the long slant of Garrison Hill. The previous evening he had alighted from the east-bound express, and sought a hotel where he might rest and mark out his course of procedure for the following day.

He found, as had been stated, that many, in fact nearly all the people he had ever known, were gone, scarcely one remaining who would probably recognize him as Jack Brainard. On the register he had written in a bold, legible hand, the name, Philip Raymond, as a precaution against surprise, consequently felt quite secure when he left his room that evening for a stroll along the banks of the river Grand and beneath the elms.

The last rays of the October sun glinted athwart the bosom of the river, causing the waves to sparkle brightly. Autumn's chill breath had touched the verdant slope with gold and the first dead leaves of the fall-time lay in dun heaps in the hollows of the woodland.

The old Garrison loomed frowningly in the gray



RESIDENCE OF JEFFERSON DAVIS,
FORT GIBSON, INDIAN TERRITORY.— PAGE I I.

of departing day, filling one with a sense of utter desolation. Moss and lichen grew about the place in tangled profusion, and long tendrils of ivy crept about over the doors and windows of the deserted houses. The dull red walls of brick and stone were silent now—yes, silent as the graves that were outlined in angular shapes upon the hill.

In the near distance the little town drowsed in languorous repose as the shades of night came creeping from out the West. Some distance down the gentle incline an old weather-beaten building reared its massive gables heavenward, standing ghost-like in the uncertain light. It was an old-fashioned house of two stories, built from the logs of the forest, which had been hewn to a line by the skill of the woodman's ax. Brainard knew the place well, for in times past he had wandered through the wide portals and listened to the romantic legends that the old inhabitants so loved to relate. The memories clustering about the forsaken structure were fraught with the romance of the earlier days of the West when all was joy, and a true spirit of freedom filled the heart of the hardy pioneer to overflowing, bringing out the latent qualities of those who builded that others might enjoy the fruits of their labor.

In other days, days when the smoke of war did not hang like a pall over the homes of the North and the South, these now empty rooms echoed with gladsome songs of pure young souls, whose lot was cast upon the extreme frontier of civilization, and

whose lives were filled with all the charm of primeval times—times when could be heard the click, click of frolicsome heels, coupled with the clank of glittering cavalry sabers, as the dashing soldiers, swaying to the rhythm of the dreamy waltz, whirled the dark-eyed daughters of the land.

Years have passed since then, long eventful years,—years filled with the onward march of progress and enlightenment.

At eventide can no longer be heard the wailing blast of the bugle, as it sounded from in front of the guard-house. No more does the echoing boom of the evening gun startle the fleet-footed bunny, or send the venturesome hedgehog scurrying to his retreat in some hollow log in the gloomy forest.

With the flight of years civilization has advanced, and the renegade and trapper, who at that time infested the clustering hills of the "Ranger" and the "Fourteen Mile" are forever gone. The rough chivalry of the scout is known no more, for he, too, has gone toward the setting sun. Last of all to leave were the soldiers. The pomp of military parade is now a thing of the past.

The clouds of war which so long hung over the settlements have drifted away on the wings of peace; the sword has been converted into the share, and the husbandman usurps the place of the warrior.

In those days, the days when the blue-coated, gold-laced men lounged beneath the trees or hunted along



NOW THE OLD BARRACK HAS FALLEN INTO DECAY: THE GRASSY SWARD IS
BUT A MASS OF TANGLED BRIARS AND BRAMBLES."— PAGE 13.

the banks of the Verdigris and the Grand, the Post was the pride of the little frontier town, and the citizens would swell their chests exultingly when showing visitors about the well-kept lawns, pointing with knowing looks at the rock building that nestled some distance to the east of the old flag-staff.

Then they would wander down by the low rambling structure, that rests upon the brow of the hill, and tell you that Irving and Longfellow whiled away the hours in its ample rooms, and that the "Coloneh," sat before the yawning fireplace and dreamed of Texan empire.

That was years and years ago. Now the old barrack has fallen into decay; the grassy sward is but a mass of tangled briars and brambles. In winter's icy grasp, it looks cheerless indeed. The hand of neglect was apparent everywhere, and the eyes of the elders grew humid when walking beneath the silent eaves and along the thorn-grown walks, for in their hearts there still lingered a tender and never-dying fondness for the days of the old régime, but the glory of the historic town wanes with the march of time.

Pausing in his steps, Jack Brainard, as we know him, viewed the landscape from every point. His sombre eyes were dark as midnight, his tall form bowed, as if carrying a load too heavy for his strength, and the lines on his face seemed to have deepened since we first met him.

As he gazed at the familiar scenes, a look of intense longing crept into his eyes, and his voice was husky with emotion as he soliloquized :

“How changed ! how changed ! yet it is the same ! There is the old barrack ; yonder is the commandant’s quarters, the guard-house, and the flag-staff from which the folds of Old Glory floated for so many years. Ten long, bitter, hopeless years ! Ah, and the end is not yet. Yonder too, is the trysting-place where we used to sit in the moonlight and look at the stars. Yes, it was there that we plighted our troth—the troth that was so ruthlessly broken. Ah, yes, years, lonely years, and yet I hope, even against the inevitable. God, can it be ?”

As the last words fell from his lips, a ghastly smile flitted across his features, and his eyes lighted with a new-born resolution. Moving a few paces forward, he seated himself upon a convenient ledge of rock and looked toward the west. For a long time he sat with his hands clasped upon his knees, and his head bowed upon his breast. Not a sound escaped him, and as memory ran riot his stern lips drew themselves into a thin red line.

Suddenly the sound of approaching footsteps smote his ears, and he was conscious of some one scrutinizing him from a distance, which aroused in him a sense of irritation. He did not immediately lift his head to return the gaze of the other, but when he did, his face was drawn as if his heart-strings were wrenched with mortal pain.

Finally raising his eyes he saw an aged negro regarding him steadily. Noticing that he was seated near a very narrow point in the path, and that the colored man could not pass him without his moving, he said :

“Well, you may pass if you wish !”

At the sound of his voice, the negro appeared to grow taller, while an amazed expression crept into his eyes. This angered Brainard, who rose to his feet, saying :

“What the devil do you want, man ? Speak !”

Still the negro did not reply, but when Brainard moved slowly towards him, he exclaimed through chattering teeth :

“Befo’ Gawd, et am a ghos’ !” then, as if speaking more to himself, he muttered : “Lawd hab mussy ! ‘tain’t—Ma’sse Jack ! No, sah, fo’ he am be’n dead fo’ de pas’ ten yeah ! Yas, sah, an’ dis am his ghos’ come bac’ t’ de ol’ home ! Oh, Lawd, I—I—”

Then turning his scared face to Brainard, he continued in quaking tones : “’Scuse me, sah, fo’ mis-tookin’ yo’ t’ be ob de flesh, please sah, an’ dis niggah’ll jes’ retiah t’ his home by de oddah paf’.”

“What do you mean, you fool !” exclaimed Brainard. “I am no ghost, but a man—yes, and full of life too.”

“Dat am what yo’ say, sah, but he’p me, hebben, et doan mek et so, an’ I ax yo’ t’ ’scuse dis niggah f’om fuddah conbersation wid yo’ et dis time. Ef I

didn't kno' yoah figgah, an' yoah voice, sah, dah am some probability dat yo' cou'd 'vince me, sah, dat yo' am not ob de lan' ob speerits, but yo' am a-losin' all ob yoah bref. Good-ebenin', sah," and with this, the frightened darkey started to retreat, and had gone some paces, when Brainard called:

"Here, hold on!"

"No, sah, I'll not hol' on; yo' jes' lebe dis niggah 'lone, kaze he am not gwine t' hab nuffin' t' do wid yo'. Spooks am not in my line, sah, an' you'll be 'bleeged t' 'scuse me! Ef yo' kain't res' in yoah grabe, jes' go an' conberse wid yoah color."

"Well, of all the darned fools I have ever met, you are undoubtedly the biggest! Who in thunderation told you that I was a ghost? Can't you see that it is only your own superstitious fears?" said Brainard, laughing heartily.

When the darkey saw this, he at once became less excited.

"Who told you I was a ghost?" reiterated Brainard.

"Dis niggah say so, sah," replied the darkey, as he nervously twirled his battered hat.

"Well, then, I should like to know who you are, since I am the 'ghost in the play," said Brainard amusedly.

"My name am Waitie, sah."

"What! Joe Waitie, who used to live out on the 'Fourteen Mile'?"

"Yas, sah, dat am who et be, sah. Good ebenin' t'

I'se jes' 'bleeged t' go, an' yo' hab my puhmission t' stay whar yo' am et de present time." With his fears renewed, the negro again started away, but Brainard called to him once more :

"Wait, Joe! You know me; I am Jack Brainard. Joe, Joe! Old friend, don't you know me? Am I so changed? Have the years obliterated all traces of what I used to be?"

As these words fell upon the ears of the negro, he stopped somewhat reassured, and waited for Brainard to come up to him. A dazed look crept about the wrinkled face of the old darkey as he held out his hand. For some moments neither of them spoke, Joe appearing to be wrestling with some half-forgotten memory. Then suddenly, as if the floodgates of the past were opened, he dropped to his knees, exclaiming :

"Fo' de lub ob hebben, ef 'tain't Ma'se Jack. Ma'se Ma'se! Oh, glory, glory! Bress de good Lawd; et am too good t' be de truf. Oh, bress de Lawd! Et am Ma'se Jack, suah 'nuff."

They looked pathetically at each other, as a sadness indescribable crept over both. Now that the recognition was complete, nothing could have so overjoyed the old negro. A pained look rested upon the face of Brainard; his thoughts were carried backward, and in the few short moments he lived over again all the struggles that had been his. Then looking into the dusky face of the kneeling negro, he said :

"Yes, Joe, it is your old friend returned. I have come back to spend the remainder of my life in the cool shadows of the hills and by the willow-fringed banks of the stream which so often I have longed for."

"An' yo' am suah yo' am Ma'se Jack?" questioned Joe, still a little doubtful as to the identity of his companion, and releasing the hand of Brainard, stepped away that he might obtain a better view of the one whom he had mistaken for a spirit.

"Yes, Joe, I am sure," replied Brainard, as he again smiled at the fears of the other. Appearing to be satisfied with this last scrutiny, the darkey continued :

"I'se 'vinced now; an' oh, golly, I'se glad! How de eyes ob ol' Chloe'll open w'en I tells 'er dat Ma'se Jack am come hum ag'in. Yah! yah!" laughed old Joe with much glee, and throwing his battered hat in the air, proceeded to dance the pigeon-wing, much to the amusement of Brainard.

"Joe," said Brainard in a husky voice, "cease your antics and listen."

He at once became all attention, and stood respectfully waiting for his friend to proceed.

"Joe, you are the only one who knows that I have returned, and I am very anxious that you keep the matter quiet. I shall remain here for a day or two, then will go away, and when all is in readiness for me, I shall return and take up my home for all time on the 'Fourteen Mile.' But now I wish to

remain as dead to all who used to know me. You must not ask my reasons for this," said Brainard, as the old darkey was about to speak. "I wish to go out to the valley of the 'Fourteen Mile,' and want you to accompany me; we will start early in the morning and not return till late at night."

"Cert'n'y, ol' Joe 'll go wid yo', Ma'se," returned the negro quickly.

By this time complete darkness had fallen, and, with a few more instructions, Brainard walked slowly down the winding pathway leading to the little town, old Joe peering after him until he was lost in the gloom of night.

CHAPTER III

"Am yo' a-dreamin', Joe Waitie, or am yo' 'witched?" Then he added in a reflective voice: "No, sah; yo' am neidah one nor de uddah, fo' I jes' know dat dar am no myst'ry 'bout all dis; an' fud-dahmo', I knows dat I hab be'n a holdin' ob conber-sation wid Ma'se Jack, an' mo'soebbah, I hab promis' t' go t' de ol' plantation wid 'im in de mahn'n'."

Thus soliloquized the darkey, as he stood and deliberated over the events of the last hour, which to him were filled with matters of great moment, and finally he continued in a voice of mournful cadence:

"Ah, Ma'se Jack, yo' am changed; de times am changed, an' de ol' plantation am 'zarted. No mo'll yo' sit on de poach in de ebenin' an' lis'n to de cooin' ob de li'l' Constance. Ma'se Jack, de ol' home am gwine t' ruin now. De trailin' vines dat ustah creep 'bout de doah am no longah dar. De cock am no longah hea'd in the bahn-ya'd, an' de han' ob decay am dar writin' all de time; yas, de ol' place am sad. Briahs an' brambles am growin' 'cross de paff dat leads down t' de spring whar ustah be de meetin' place, an' de rabbit am scared et de noise ob de foot-steps. All am changed 'cep'n' de stun wall whar yo' an' de young Missus lubbed t' stan' in de moon-

light an' lis'n t' de cry ob de night bi'd. Ah, Ma'se Jack, den yo' spoke in tones dat wah music t' de eahs ob ol' Joe, who wah res'n' in de shadows on de wahm summer ebenins.

"Et am true de stahs an' de moon am jes' de same, but dey looks down no mo' on de happy home out yondah, an' et am 'zarted, yas, 'zarted, Ma'se Jack. De ol' place am lonely now.

"An' de li'l' white church am gone; nuffin' lef' but tangled vines; an' de thorn bushes grow dah now. De stohms hab laid de ol' elms low, an' all am silent as de grabe; but yo' am changed de mos' ob all, Ma'se Jack," muttered the aged negro as he walked slowly towards his humble home.

After having partaken of his frugal meal, old Joe sat down by the fire. Drawing nearer the flame he filled his pipe and was soon enveloped in a dense cloud of aromatic smoke much to the discomfort of his companion, who grumbled something about "fool niggers—smoke, etc.," but Joe, all unmindful of Chloe's indignant remonstrance, continued to puff contentedly, lost the while in deep meditation.

Chloe put away the remains of the evening repast, and washed the dishes, placing them in the cupboard, then drew her chair close to her husband and seemed waiting for him to speak, but for a long time not a word was uttered. At last she turned, and casting an inquisitive glance at him, said:

"Joseph Bonaparte Waitie, what am yo' t'inkin' 'bout t'night?"

"Nuffin' 'tall."

"G'long, Joseph Waitie! Yo' doan 'spec t' fool dis niggah wid yoah prevar'catin'!"

"'Clar' t' goodness, et am de truff."

"Dat am a likely yarn. Whar yo' be'n all day? Wha' cher be'n doin', an' whyfo' hain't yo' come home when de sun am gone down?"

"G'long, Chloe; doan' I tol' yo' dat I ain't t'inkin' 'bout nuffin'?"

"Huh! de ol' debbil suah gwine t' git yo' fo' lyin'. Kain't I see dat lie in yoah eye? Ob co'se!"

With this, she drew her chair closer, and laying her wrinkled hand upon his arm, was silent. A look of intense longing crept over her aged face, while two glistening tears rolled down her ebony cheeks and fell upon her spotless apron. As a low quivering sigh welled from her lips, Joe put his arm softly around her shoulders, and then they sat gazing into the bed of coals that cast flickering shadows about the room playing hide-and-seek on the gloomy background.

Still not a word was spoken until suddenly the mournful cry of a night-hawk was heard, which served to break the silence, and as Chloe sighed again, she looked at Joe and found him regarding her attentively. The ghost of a smile wreathed his rubber-like lips, and drawing her to him, he said, in a voice laden with emotion:

"Chloe, chile! et am a long time sense we lef' de ol' home an' come t' de 'Garrison' t' be neah de

ol' Missus. Yas, ten long yeahs, an' de time am come for us t' go back t' de hills. Yoah husban' am gittin' ol' now, Chloe. See! look et de fros' dat am creepin' 'mong de wool. My haid'll soon be's white es de bu'ful snow what come when de bi'ds am gone t' de souflan'. An' Chloe, de good Lawd am got His eye 'pon yo'an' me; soon He gwine t' call us an' den we mus' go. Doan' yo' min' de li'l' grassy lot dat we ustah visit in de yeahs dat am gone? Doan' yo' min' de li'l' haid-boa'ds dat we put t' de graves ob our chillun out yondah on de 'Foo'teen Mile'? Now, de cabin ruff am fallin' in; de doah screek on de rusty hinges. Ol' Cezar am gone dese pas' eight yeah, an' de 'possum an' de coon am all dat roam 'bout de ol' home t'-night.

"De win' sigh 'bout de trees, an' de le'bes fall t' de groun,' den dey am cotch up an' scattahed t' de foah co'nahs ob de earf, so et hab be'n wib de chillun; dey am gone out in de col', col' worl'; dey am walkin' in de paff ob ebil ways. Yas, Chloe, dey hab fo'got de home ob de long 'go."

"Joseph, yo' am sad; I see de teah a-creepin' inter yoah eye. Yoah heart am trubl'd an' de aih am full ob myst'ry," said the aged woman, as she placed her hand lovingly upon the head of her husband.

"T'-day, I wah down t' see de ol' Missus, Joey, an' she, too, am sad. She tuk my ol' blac' han,' an' say: 'Chloe, my heart am full. I see de road t' hebben growin' brighter an' brighter all de time;

but I kain't go; sump'n' hol's me bac', an' den de teah come t' de eyes ob de deah ol' Missus, an' she cried an' cried. Den she say, kindah sad-like :

" 'Chloe, de time am not long, an' den I'll go, yas, I'll go an' be wid my li'l' ones in dat home wha' no sorrah ebah come,' an' den she smile an' say: 'Chloe, I'm so tiahed.' I places huh han' in mine, an' I lay huh on de bed an' in a li'l' while she wah a-sleepin'. In de dim light, I see de sweet'es' smile on huh face, an' she look so bu'ful, Joey. Fo' a long time I sot by huh, an' den come t' our own li'l' cabin. Yas, de aih am full ob myst'ry, full ob myst'ry."

Some moments elapsed before a word was spoken, when at last Joe said: "Chloe, yo' am right; de aih am full ob myst'ry. Lis'n, Chloe, Ise gwine t' tole yo' sump'n' an' yo' mus' hol' yoah tongue; heah? hol' yoah tongue."

"Dat I will, Joseph Bonaparte Waitie, dat I will; doan yo' min' 'bout my tongue; et am not waggin' all de time, I hab yo' know."

"Wall, yo' axes me wha' I be'n, an' what I be'n tinkin' 'bout dis eb'nin'. Ah, Chloe, et am strange, strange; 'mos' like de grave had open an' let his speerit come back t' earf."

"G'on, Joe, g'on, wha' fo' yo' keep me in dis 'spense. Kain't yo' see et am killin' me? Who am come outen de grave? Wha' am yo' so strange, an' wha' am yo' so 'ster'ous 'bout, yo' ol' niggah?" cried Chloe in an excited voice, more to hide her own disturbed feelings than anything else.

For a moment old Joe did not vouchsafe any reply to her numerous questions, but finally said :

“ Ma’sè Jack Brainard ain come back.”

“ Wha’ dat yo’ say ? ” shrieked Chloe. “ Wha’ yo’ tol’ dis niggah ’bout Ma’sè Jack Brainard comin’ back ? Joseph Bonaparte Waitie, now I knows wha’ am de mattah wid yo’ ; yo’ hab be’n guzzlin’ some speerits down ’t de Colonel’s, an’ doan yo’ say yo’ hain’t, neidah,” she continued, as Joe essayed to enter a denial.

“ Chloë, yo’ am outen yoah haid. Doan yo’ know dat I hain’t be’n down t’ de Colonel’s house dis eb’nin’ ? ”

“ Wha’ yo’ be’n, den ? ”

“ Doan I tol’ yo’ I be’n hol’in’ conbersashun wid Ma’sè Jack Brainard ? ”

“ Huh, Joe, yo’ mus’ t’ink I’sè a fool suah ’nuff. Doan I kno’s dat Ma’sè Brainard hab be’n daid fo’ de longes’ ? ”

“ No, Chloë, yo’ doan kno’ et ; yo’ hab t’ink so dat’s all. Doan I tol’ yo’ dat I hab be’n hol’in’ ob a conbersashun wid ’im,” repeated Joe angrily.

“ Wha’, Joe, wha’ ? ” asked old Chloe, who at last appeared to realize that her husband was speaking the truth, and as a result became deeply interested.

“ Et wah dis way, Chloë : As I wah comin up de paff jes’ ’bout da’k, I see a man settin’ dah on de rocks. He wah settin’ dah in de dyin’ light ob da’ wid his haid bowin’ down on ’is han’, an’ he wah so

still an' sad-lookin' dat I wah 'bleeged t' look et 'im. He heah m' an' rise up an' say savage-like, 'Wha' de debbil yo' want?' I 'clar' t' goodness, Chloe, he mos' scah m' t' deff."

"Wha' d' yo' do, Joe?"

"I jes' stan' dah an' look, an' look, 'kaze I wah ob de 'pinion dat I'd heah'n dat v'ice befo'. I wah scah'd do', an' cudd'n' hab tol' m' name; den 'e speak agin, an' hol' his han' up kindah tiahed-like, an' shove back de long haih, an' den I see et am Ma'se Jack."

"Fo' de lan's sake, Joe, yo' am a-dreamin'. Doan de papahs all say dat Ma'se Jack an' de li'l' furriner wah kill wa' down on de Pacos Ribbah? Ob co'se, ob co'se!"

"Yo' am right 'bout de papahs, but suah es yo' bohn, de papahs tol' er lie, an' he am in de 'Garrison.' Hain't I cotch 'im by de han', an' hol' conbersashun wid 'im fo' ten minits?"

"Joe, et am strange, et am strange!"

"Yo' am right, Chloe, et am strange, but eberyting am be'n cu'yus fo' de longes'."

"Las' night, w'en ol' Pete an' me wah huntin' down by de ribbah, we wah gwine fru de Injun grabeya'd, w'en all ob a suddint a wil'cat scream right at us, an' et wah sich a wil', mou'nful cry, dat ol' Pete come an' squat doawn right betwix' my laigs an' trimble an' groan jes' lak 'e wah ailin'. Den dat varmint spring f'om de lim' an' I could heah et swimmin' de ribbah an' w'en et come t' de

oddah bank, et tuhned an' screamed foah times, den went lopin' off'n de woods, an' wah los'. Ol' Pete, he jes' lay an' whine. He wuddn't hunt no mo', an' we come home an' lebe all de coons an' possums grinnin' et us es we come sneakin' in jes' 'fo' de brek ob da'; an' all da', Chloe, I be'n t'inkin' an' feelin' cu'yus. I hab had a longin' de whol' da' fo' de flint hills ob de 'Fourteen Mile' wha' we libed so many happy yeah—" here the old negro's voice grew husky with emotion, then he went on:

"Yas, fo' de place wha' de ol' Missus an' de young Missus lib' an' wha' de persimmon grow mellow an' sweet wid de fus' fros'. Yas, Chloe, dem wah happy times; de chillun wah dah et night time, an' we 'semble 'roun' de harfstun, an' pop de pop-cohn an' crack de hick'ry nut and de wahnut, an' et de chinkapin, an' sing de ol' songs; den I wah happy, an' yo' wah happy, an' we nebbah worry 'bout de morrah. Now, Chloe, et am all changed—de chillun am gone; de home am silent es de grabe ob de dead, an' de heart ob ol' Joe am hebby. De home ob de Missus am sad, too, an' our li'l' gearl am eatin' huh heart ebery da'." Then he added reflectively, "Yas, she am eaten' huh heaht ebery da'. Well does I 'member de time de telegraph come an' de yallah papah tol' huh ob de wil' doin's ob de man she lub. She wah in de school house an' w'en she see dem debblish wo'ds, she jes' sink down on de floo' an' say, 'Take me home, Oh, take me home,' den she press her li'l' han' t' huh heart an'

moan, an' moan. Huh face went pale, an' de sadness ob deff come an' settle down on huh. Den come Ma'se Jack an' say, et' am all a lie, an' ax de li'l' Constance t' trus' 'im, but she tuhn awa' an' sigh jes' like she wah tiahed ob libben; an' he wen' awa'. I wa'ch 'im till 'e tuhn de ben' in de road, an' w'en I come back, she wah layin' so still an' white on de li'l' bed dat I mos' belebe she'd gone awa' wid an angel, but den she say :

“ ‘ Joe, fotch de banjo, I want t' heah yo' pla' de “ Ol' Kaintucky Home ” onet mo', an' I go git dey instrumen' an' sot down et de foot ob huh bed an' sing :

“ ‘ De day goes by like a shadow o'er de heart,
 'Tis sorrah wha' all wah delight ;
De time am come w'en de darkies hab t' part,
 Den my ol' Kaintucky home good-night !

“ ‘ Weep no mo', my lady,
 Oh ! weep no mo' to-day !
We'll sing one song fo' de ol' Kaintucky home,
 Fo' de ol' Kaintucky home far awa'.”

“ I sing de song, ebery wo'd, an' we'n I hab finish et, de li'l' Missus look et me wid dem big black eyes, an' smile, an' say :

“ ‘ T'ank yo', Joe; yo' am berry kin', den she tuhn her face t' de wall, an' I move soffly outen de room, an' lef' huh 'lone wid huh sorrah.”

CHAPTER IV.

JOE was silent for a time, then was suddenly aroused from his reverie by his wife, who gave a muffled scream. He looked at her and found her gazing at the window with distended eyes. Her teeth were chattering, and her black skin had changed to an ashy hue. She was trembling in every limb, as he turned and caught her swaying form.

"Chloe, Chloe! wha' am de mattah wid yo'?" asked he, but she did not answer. Slowly she raised her arm, and with shaking finger, pointed to the window:

"Dah, dah, Joey; look dah! Oh Lawd, who am et?"

Joe turned quickly, and there with his face closely glued to the pane, stood a man looking wild and haggard. In his eyes rested a hunted expression. His lips were slightly drawn, while his teeth gleamed wickedly in the flickering firelight.

As soon as Joe's eyes lighted on his face, he sprang to his feet, and grasping a huge poker with both hands, yelled:

"Yo' debbil, yo'! I knows yo', an' I'll bre'k

ebery bone in yo.' Yo' debbil, whyfo' yo' come back heah?" and with this, he hurled his weapon. Crash! went the panes of glass. A mocking laugh rang out in the darkness, and a voice cried:

"So Brainard has returned! Ha, ha, ha! Joe Waitie, curse ye, remember that Bart Nelson, the half-breed, still lives also!"

As the last words were uttered, they were answered by the mournful cry of the whip-poor-will as it winged its way through the gloom. Old Joe covered the live embers on the hearth, and whispering to his wife bade her move. Silently the aged negress changed her position, and stood breathing heavily in the Stygian darkness. Her husband crept up close to her, and placing his arm about her bowed shoulders, whispered:

"Chloe, de ol' Harry am loose t'-night. De aih am 'deed full of myst'ry, an' ol' Joe see trubble brewin,' in de el'ments. Fus', come Ma'se Jack es one f'om de grabe; den come dat debbil, Bart Nelson, f'om de Lawd knows wha'."

"Yo' am right, Joe Waitie, yo' am right, an' t'morra am de da' w'en de young Missus am t' come home wid huh orfin chile. May de good Lawd p'tec' huh f'om de han's ob dat debbil Bart. De po' li'l' gearl am comin' back t' de ol' home now. Oh, Lawd, de da' am sad, an' de night am blac' wid de signs ob ebil."

"Chloe, honey, place yoah trus' in the Gawd ob de ol' Missus; He am de frien' ob de blac' man es well

es ob de white man. He am de one dat am allus ready t' fotch us home, w'en He am suah dat we am ob de fai'ful."

"So He am, Joe. Le's kneel down heah in de da'k, an' ax Him t' keep us in de hours ob tribulation what am a-comin' t' us."

Down they knelt, these humble souls. For a time no word was spoken, then old Joe in childlike tones poured forth a fervent prayer to his Heavenly Father.

"Lawd, yo' who am de light ob de worl', who am de frien' ob all, I axes yo' t' hab mussy, 'case de signs am full ob ebil. Dey is stormy, an' de vendettah am come ag'in. De las' moon wah red; dah wah blood 'pon et, an' deff creeps 'bout de doah. De heart ob ol' Joe am filled wid sorrah. Bressed Lawd, won' yo' took us up in yoah han' an' sabe us f'om de ebils ob dis worl'?"

For a long time the faithful old man prayed, and when he had finished, arose, and silently reaching out his hand, lifted Chloe to her feet.

"Yo' stan' in de da'k, Chloe, an' I'll move de bed les' dat debbil Bart come back."

When he had made the alteration mentioned, he said:

"De bed am fix', Chloe, yo' kin retiah."

She did so at once, and was soon tucked away beneath the snow-white blankets. For a long while old Joe sat musing in the darkness, and at last crept to bed, but not to sleep. Morning dawned, and while

the winged steeds of Phoebus were still champing their bits in the purpling East, Joe was up busily engaged in doing the chores about the house.

Presently the white-turbaned head of old Chloe appeared in the doorway. A placid smile wreathed her lips, as she spoke to her husband:

"Joe, wha' am yo' doin' out dah?"

"I'se fixin' de feed fo' de ho'ses, 'caze I'se got t' go an' meet Ma'se Jack, so yo' mak' has' wid de bre'k-fas'."

"Wha' fo' yo' go t' meet de Ma'se?"

"'Caze I promis' I'd go t' de ol' home wid 'im." Then old Joe came around the corner of the cabin with his arms full of wood, and a mysterious look on his wrinkled face.

"Chloe, while yoah Joey am gone, yo' mus' stay in de house, an' min' yo' doan say nuffin' 'bout Ma'se Jack Brainard comin' back, an' nuffin' neidah 'bout dat debbil Bart Nelson. Keep de house da'k, an' keep yoah eye on de windah."

"I'll do jes' lak yo' say, Joey; yoah Chloe'll do de bes' she c'n. Go wash yoah han's an' face, Joey, fo' de chicken am done brown, an' de coffee am smokin' hot."

When Joe had performed his ablutions as directed by Chloe, he came into the kitchen, and was soon devouring his breakfast. By the time he had finished, the sun had climbed above the low range of eastern hills and was glinting his amber rays across the daisy-strewn prairie. The surface of the river glit-

tered like a shield of beaten gold, and the dewdrops sparkled diamond-like, as they clung tenderly to the swaying foxtails and sunflowers. The little town at the base of the hill was yet slumbering, all unmindful of the incidents which had taken place. Calling his wife to him, old Joe said:

"Chloe, yo' tol' me dat de li'l' Missus wah comin' home t'-day, an' I mus' tol' yo' dat yo' am t' hol' yoah tongue; nebbah mus' yo' say de name ob Ma'se Jack wha' she c'n heah et, 'caze her life am sad 'nuff jes' now, an' her min' am on de new-made grabe in de Norf'."

"Joey, I heah yo', an' will 'bide yoah 'vice in de mattah."

A moment later, Joe Waitie passed out of the gate, and was making his way to the spot where he was to meet Jack Brainard.

CHAPTER V

"How is No. 56, Jim?" asked Charlie the hack-driver, who met all the trains on the valley division.

"'N hour late; Bull Creek trestle burnt out," answered the operator, who was agent, also.

At this information, the driver left the depot, and gazed idly up and down the track. Not a soul was in sight, and with a yawn he strolled listlessly over to his rattle-trap coach, curled up on the front seat, threw a dirty lap-robe over him, and was soon fast asleep, to be awakened an hour or more later by the shrill blast of the engineer's whistle, as his train swung around the curve and slowed up at the tank.

In a short while the great iron monster came puffing by, and stopped at the platform. Charlie was all alert, and called out lustily, "Hack, hack for any part of the Garrison. Hack, lady? Take you to any part of the Garrison. Get right in," he said to the only passenger that left the train.

She was heavily veiled, and her features were not visible. By her side walked a small boy that had one hand clasped in hers, and the other was doubled up into a little fist that was pressed against his



"PASSING DOWN THE LONG STRAGGLING STREET THE DRIVER SOON LEFT THE VALLEY AND DIRECTED HIS HORSES UP THE WINDING ROAD TO THE GARRISON." — PAGE 35.

sleepy eyes which he rubbed in the effort to awaken himself more effectually.

"Mamma, is dis w're dranma lives?" asked the little fellow, while looking around him curiously.

"Yes, Hal; this is where your grandmamma lives," answered the mother in a low, yet audible tone, as she seated herself in the rickety vehicle; then turning to the driver, who was gathering up the reins, said, "To the 'Garrison Place.'" The tones of her voice caused him to look at her more closely, then with a snap of his long whip, they went rattling over the stony road at a speed which threatened to overturn the conveyance.

Passing down the long straggling street the driver soon left the valley, and directed his horses up the winding road whose termination was the deserted "Garrison." On the way, he occasionally viewed his passenger through the corner of his eye.

"She's seen sorrow," he mentally ejaculated, as a low quivering sigh welled unconsciously from the lips of the woman.

Old Joe, who was threading his way down the broken pathway, spied the carriage.

"Dah go de young Missus an' her li'l' boy. Dey am gwine t' de Garrison. May de good Lawd hab mussy am de prayah ob ol' Joe," he mused, as he passed behind a hedge which screened him from view, and continued his walk, leaving the carriage and its occupants behind.

For some time he walked rapidly, coming at last

to a bend in the road where he stopped and listened intently. Not a sound broke the stillness, save the twittering of a blue jay on a distant limb.

Presently, however, he perceived the tall figure of a man approaching, and recognized his friend, Jack Brainard, whom he saluted:

"Good mahn'n', Ma'se Jack!"

"Howdy, Joe! I see you are here," said Brainard.

"Yas, sah, I'se heah," returned Joe.

"Well, are you ready?"

"Yas, sah!"

"Very well, then; so am I," said Brainard, who at once turned his face to the rising sun, whose warm rays had just begun to lift clouds of vapor from the western lowlands.

The Express, which had stopped at the station, went thundering by, leaving in its wake a long line of spiral smoke, which was wafted away on the morning breeze. Brainard stood a moment and watched it as it swept swiftly around a distant curve. When the noise of the rumbling wheels had died away, and naught could be heard but a wailing blast from the engine, Brainard resumed his journey, followed by Joe Waitie.

For an hour or more they proceeded on their way, each occupied with his own thoughts. As they advanced, the country about them became more rugged and wild. The intertwining branches overhead shut out the life-giving rays of the sun. Little squirrels chattered noisily in the tops of the towering trees, and

with startled eyes peered at the two men walking silently beneath them. Before Brainard and his companion had gone many miles, the road had dwindled down to a mere path which wound sinuously about huge boulders and fallen trees. At intervals, small glades were formed through which gurgled a little stream of limpid water.

They came to a spot which had once been cleared, but now was covered with a dense underbrush. In the center, which was several acres in extent, stood a number of mammoth elms, whose tops seemed to touch the heavens, while the shadows cast by the branches formed the circumference of a large circle. From this point, one could obtain a panoramic view of a beautiful valley lying between high rocky cliffs. The surface of the valley had once been a plantation, though at present sadly neglected, and tangled thickets were to be seen on all sides. To the northeast, limestone cliffs lifted their white faces heavenward and were adorned with trailing ivy and grapevines.

As the gaze of Brainard swept the vale, he paused beneath the low branches of an elm, and silently drank in the scene. Old Joe stood leaning against the trunk of a fallen tree, the meanwhile watching Brainard with furtive eyes and compressed lips.

In times agone, they together had viewed this identical scene, yet under circumstances vastly different from those of the present.

CHAPTER VI

BRAINARD was thinking of a glad bright day when he had first come to this sacred spot. On his arm had rested the white hand of a beautiful maiden, with the bloom of youth glowing upon her cheeks, and a merry twinkle in her glorious eyes.

Then memory reverted to the little white building which had nestled beneath the self-same trees under which he was standing, and once again he saw the interior of that little church. Upon the wall hung the picture of the crucifixion. Behind the pulpit stood the aged minister, and he heard again the sweet strains of: "Nearer, My God, to Thee." As the words of the hymn arose, he saw the damask cheeks of his fair companion glow with tender reverence as she sang in a low sweet voice. He saw the shapely head bowed in humble supplication to the Father of all, and his soul thrilled with endless love for her.

Time sped on golden wings, a cloud obscured his sunlit heaven, and the darkness of death hovered over him. Once more the memory of a white wan face flitted across his vision, a face filled with utter relentlessness and condemnation. In vain had he plead

with her, but his words were powerless to change her stony resolution. She condemned him without a word of explanation, and he went out into the world without knowing why he was banished. Then came the day of parting, the hour in which he was to read his doom in the steady light of her midnight eyes.

Time had flown. Year after year had he spent vainly seeking peace from the gnawing pain that wrenched his very soul. He had traveled in distant lands. He had braved the snow-capped waves of the stormy Atlantic; he had sought the solitude of mountain fastnesses. In vain he had wandered, for he was still haunted by the ghost of happier days. All his efforts to forget were useless; the memory was yet vividly distinct, and he had returned to look upon the scene of those halcyon hours.

The changes about him were in keeping with his own desolate soul. All that remained to him of her was a soiled package of letters which had gone with him into the clime of every land. They had been lovingly read until every word was graven indelibly upon memory's tablet. For many years he had not mentioned her name, and knew not whether she lived, or whether the lilies of the valley bloomed on her silent grave, until the letter reached him in his Denver home. Nor would he endeavor to discover the truth until then, for her memory was sacred, and his love as changeless as the everlasting hills whose summits seemed to pierce the azure dome.

For a long time he stood in self-communion. At

last he turned his face to Joe, who had noticed its deadly pallor, and with a feeling of uneasiness approached him. Silently Brainard motioned him away and moved towards a log that lay half-hidden among the vines.

The sadness of a never-ending remorse rested upon him as he seated himself, and then beckoned to Joe to come nearer, when he put out his hand and clasped that of the faithful old negro.

"Joe, this is the most sacred spot on earth to me, and you must never mention my weakness, but the memory of the past unnerves me."

"Ma'se Jack, yoah feelin's am 'spected by de blac' man dat am yoah frien'."

"Joe, I have come back to live and die here. Will you come and be with me as you once were?"

"Wha' yo' mean, Ma'se Jack? Does yo' wan' de ol' niggah t' come back t' de Foo'teen Mile, an' lib wid yo'?"

"Yes; I have purchased this property, and soon the workmen will be here to build me a house."

"Lawd bress yo', Ma'se Jack, ob co'se de ol' niggah'll come; but how'd yo' kno' dat de ol' home wah 'stroyed; dat's wha' dis niggah lub t' kno'."

"My agent informed me, having learned the fact when he came to negotiate for the land."

"Am dat so?"

"Yes, Joe, that is a fact."

"Ma'se Jack, am yo' gwine t' lib all by yoahself?"

"Certainly, except that you and Chloe shall have

a cabin close by; and my ward, who will live here also."

At the mention of a cabin, old Joe's eyes sparkled, and he replied in a glad voice:

"A new cabin! Mussy, how de eyes ob Chloe'll sparkle w'en I tol' huh dat. Ma'se, de worl' hab be'n bery bad wid ol' Joe, an' de las' two or free yeahs de wof hab be'n squattin' right et de doah, an' de heaht ob Joe wah sad.

"An' jes' las' night, sah, w'en I foun' yo' settin' by de paf, so still-lak' I t'ink yo' wah a ghos' ; I wah t'inkin' ob yo' den, an' my haih mos' los' all de kink, an' my heaht clumb in my mouf, an'—an' Ma'se Jack, I mos' sho' yo' my heels; yah! yah!"

"You will remember, Joe, that I am still a ghost."

"Wha' yo' mean, Ma'se Jack?"

"Why, I mean, that I will remain dead to everybody except you and Aunt Chloe."

"You am jokin' wid me, Ma'se Jack," said Joe, whose mind refused to grasp the purport of Brainard's words. "Yas, sah, yo' am jokin', fo' yo' am not dead; yo' am alibe; doan' I see yo', an' hab'n't I walk wid yo' fo' miles and miles dis mahn'n'?"

"Joe, you misunderstand me; I mean that I don't wish any one to know that I have returned, or to have an opportunity of recognizing me. And they hardly will, for see, am I not changed? Is my hair not frosted with gray? Is not my face drawn and pale? Why, I'm an old man now!"

"Yas, sah, so et am," admitted Joe. "Ma'se Jack,

yo' am right; yoah bes' frien' wuddn't know yo', but dah am not many ob de ol' folks lef' now."

"Do you really think so, Joe?" asked Brainard, in a voice which expressed satisfaction.

"Ob co'se, Ma'se Jack."

"Very well, then, I am satisfied; it will save me embarrassing questions," returned Brainard.

"Joe, come and sit down, and I will instruct you in all I want you to do from this hour, as you are now in my employ, and my vengeance will fall heavily upon you if you ever betray me by word or sign."

"I heahs yo', Ma'se Jack, an' yo' c'n jes' 'ly on me t' de las' breff. Ma'se, I'se yoah frien', an' de frien' ob de young Miss——"

"Stop!" thundered Brainard, as a pained look swept over his face. Then he said sternly: "Joe, that name is never to be mentioned. Let the past rest in its grave. She is but a radiant memory that haunts me every moment of my life. God bless her!"

"'Scuse me, Ma'se Jack; I nebbah mean no ha'm, an' nebbah ag'in'll dis mouf spoke of huh."

"Forgive me, Joe, old friend; I know you meant well, but as to what I was going to say. To-night, I leave here to be gone some weeks, probably months. In a few days, a man will come to you and you are to bring him here. You are to show him the location, and with your help he will also build your cabin. He will have money to pay for everything. When the buildings are completed, he will see that they are

furnished throughout and everything will be in readiness for my return. You are to go to the village and move your wife into your new cabin, provided she swears that she will remain silent as to my identity, and also concerning all events that may transpire in the valley after my return. You understand now what I desire. Will you comply with my wishes?"

"Ma'se Jack, yo' am a st'ange man, but ol' Joe hab confidence in yo', an'll 'gree t' do es yo' hab tol' 'im, on de oaf ob a Christian gen'man," he added, to make his vow more binding.

"All right, Joe; you can go now, but remember, not one word; you are to be as silent as the grave."

A gentle breeze arose, and catching the folds of Joe's old coat blew it back, disclosing the protruding handle of a gun.

"Why, Joe, I see you are armed."

"Yas, sah, an' I 'clar to goodness, I mos' forgot t' tol' yo' wha' I see, an' wha' happen las' night."

"What was it, Joe? What took place last night?"

"Ma'se, de debbil come back a'gin las' night!"

"The devil come, Joe! You must be crazy!"

"No, sah, Joe am not crazy; an' ef yo'll puhmit me, sah, I'll tol' yo' de hull truff."

"All right, Joe, proceed; but I am sure your superstitious fears have gotten the better of you."

"Can't sa' nuffin' 'bout 'stitious feahs, sah, but I kno' dat Bart Nelson am hidin' 'roun' in dese hills, 'caze I see his deb'lish face et de cabin windah las' night."

"What! Bart Nelson here!" almost screamed Brainard, as he leaped to his feet and stood white and trembling with anger. "Joe, you lie, you dog!"

"No, sah, I does not, fo' doan I bre'k ebery glass in de windah w'en I fro de poker et dat debblish haid ob his'n?"

"My God! My God!" groaned Brainard between clinched teeth. "Will it never end? Am I to stain my hands in the life-blood of that devil in human shape? God forbid! God forbid! And all on account of his mad love for her!" then his white teeth clinched savagely, and a dangerous gleam shone in his eyes, while an unalterable determination was visible in his erect bearing, because for years Brainard had associated his banishment with Nelson, who was his mortal enemy, and at times the thought of him aroused him to fury.

"If that villain crosses my path, his life or mine will come to an end," muttered Brainard, then turning to old Joe, who was waiting patiently, said:

"You can go; I will linger here in the valley a while longer, then follow, as I desire to catch the west-bound to-day. Remember, don't forget your instructions. Good-by!"

"Good-by, Ma'se Jack," said Joe, turning his face homeward, and was soon hidden by the dense growth of foliage.

For some moments Brainard remained standing where Joe had left him. He held his hat in his hand, and a gentle breeze sweeping down the valley tossed

his iron-gray locks away from a broad white forehead, which gleamed like marble. The lines of his face showed unmistakable signs of early dissipation, which marred it somewhat, yet leaving traces of individuality and tenacity of purpose plainly discernible. His eyes, dark and mournful, held a history in their fathomless depths. His hands were well-formed, and the long tapering fingers bespoke refinement.

For a long, long time he remained motionless, gazing upon the tangled mass of vines and distant bluffs.

Presently, as if satisfied with his survey, Brainard placed his hat upon his head, and entered the pathway which led him to the north. A look of tender reverence settled on his face as his gaze wandered from one well-remembered spot to another. Dread desolation was there. It was the homestead on the banks of the Fourteen Mile.

He lingered there an hour with a heart filled with conflicting emotions against what he was pleased to term the irony of fate, then plunging into the dense thicket, he ascended the hill which commanded an extended view.

"Constance, how different it might have been." The words were bitter with irony. He remained only a short time on this elevation, then walked rapidly in the direction of the station, some miles away, only to return when all was in readiness for his homecoming.

For a time he was leaving behind the scene of his

early happiness, the memory of which had grown brighter and brighter as the years flew by. Yet with the sweetness of the memory there was a corresponding bitterness—the bitterness which ever accompanies the “might have been.”

When he reached the station, the operator who had been at the key in the morning was bustling about the office, and in reply to Brainard's inquiry, informed him that the west-bound was on time; and shortly the keen blast of a whistle was heard away to the south, and soon the train came rolling around the curve. A short stop was made, Brainard went aboard, the conductor waved his hand, and the train pulled slowly out of the station.



“DE LI’L GEARL COM’ HOME T’-DAY, JOEY, AN’ FOTCH DE CHILE.
SHE AM DOWN T’ DE ELMS.”—PAGE 48.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN old Joe left Brainard standing statue-like beneath the spreading branches of the elm, he hastened until he was lost in the depths of the forest. By taking by-paths, climbing fences, and cutting across lots, he soon reached his humble cabin.

With a vigorous thump he summoned his wife who, after peering cautiously out of the window to see who it was knocking, slowly opened the one door. Placing herself in front of him, arms akimbo, she waited for him to enlighten her, but as he was silent, she regarded him with impatience. At last, as he looked at her inquiring eyes, he said:

"Chloe, we am gwine t' bid fah'well t' de Garrison an' 'tuhn t' de hills. Yo' mus' pack all de t'ings, an' git yo'self ready fo' de jou'ney, w'ile I goes t' de Missus an' tol' huh dat we am gwine bac' t' de banks ob de Foo'teen Mile."

"Fo' de lan's sake, man, w'at on dis earf yo' mean?" ejaculated Chloe, her eyes sparkling with anticipation.

Then Joe sat down and proceeded to unfold in de-

tail all he knew concerning the change of fortune which had come to them, concluding with:

"Yas, we am gwine. Ma'se Jack done promis' dat we am t' lib wid 'im, an' et am bettah dan stayin' heah. Dar am allahs a lot ob triflin' niggahs 'bout town dat jes' lay 'roun' an keep de hones' men f'om makin 'dey libben."

"Joey, yo' am right, but w'at de Missus say t' us gwine? De li'l' gearl com' home t'-day, Joey, an' fotch de chile. She am down t' de Elms; yo' kno' she am come back t' stay all de time."

"Jes' yo' git de dinnah, an' I'll go t' de house an' tol' de Missus all 'bout et." With this, Joe placed his hat on his head and was soon trudging along the dusty road leading to the home of his old Mistress. As he drew near, his steps became slow, and in his mind he prepared the story he was to tell. When he reached the door he lifted the latch and, hesitating, was bidden to enter. Bowing gravely, he said:

"Good-mahn'n', Missus."

"Well, Joe, what do you wish?" inquired a sweet-faced elderly lady, who was sitting in a willow chair.

The voice was soft and low, while her face beamed with a gentle languorous smile, native to the Southland. Her hands, almost transparent in their whiteness, played idly with the silken curls of a beautiful boy perched confidently on the arm of the chair, and whose somber eyes laughed silently at the grotesque appearance of the old darkey.

"Missus, I—I—" here Joe stopped and looked down as if ashamed.

"Well, Joe, go on," said the lady kindly, as she too smiled at the turpitude of her old servitor.

"Missus, I—I—" his voice grew husky with emotion, but with an effort he continued, "I am come t' tol' yo' dat ol' Joe am gwine t' lebe yo'; he am gwine bac' t' de hills."

"Why dear me!" said the lady, with uplifted brows; "back to the hills! Why Joe!" and gently placing the child on the floor, she turned and regarded him in amazement.

"Yas'm, bac' t' de hills; an' I cudd'n' go les' I tol' yo'; but Missus, yo' kno' dat de ol' slabe am git-tin' up in yeahs bery fas'. De fros' hab be'n a set-lin' on de haid ob Joe fo' nigh on sixty yeah, an' de times am bad fo' de blac' man. Las' night, Missus, de cock crow foah times befo' de clock strike de hour ob twelve, an' dat tol' ol' Joe dat sump'n' gwine t' come t' pas', an' dat sump'n' gwine t' happen t' Joe or de ol' 'oman, an' she say t' me dis mahn'n', 'Joey les' go bac' t' de 'Fo'teen Mile.' Yo' kno' de graves ob de li'l' chillun am dar, an' de briahts an' de bushes gro' obah dey silen' bres'. De ruff ob de cabin am fallin' in, an' de doah screek on de rusty hinges. De fahm am growin' wil' wid de vines, an' de honey bee buzz 'bout de locus' dat gro' in de yahd.

"De groun's in de cup say dah am 'steri'us t'ings gwine t' took place; I see de teahs a-runnin' an' awa' off yondah I see a grabe.' So I say t' Chloe, de

Missus mus' be tol', an' heah am ol' Joe fo' dat pu'pos'. Missus, in de long ago w'en we all libed on de fahm, when yoah chillun an' my chillun wah all runnin' arter de buttahfly, an' a chasin' de cotton-tail, an' a-huntin' de 'possum on de moonlit banks ob de Fo'teen Mile, an' w'en de Cales an' de Rosses ustah come down f'om de clusterin' hills ob de Ranger an' de Honey Creek, an' de young fo'ks dance 'bout de May-pole, an' Joe strum de banjo, dis niggah wah happy; but now et am all changed—all am gone fo'm de hills obah yondah," with a wave of his hand to make his words more impressive, "an' de valley am 'zarted; ob nights only de ebil speerits am foun' dar. De fox roam in de woods; de owl screech f'om de cabin doah, an' de wil' cat scream down by de runnin' watah. Missus, ol' Joe hab be'n es kin' t' yo' es he c'd, an' he won't go ef yo' jes' say de wo'd no; do de heah ob Chloe am bre'kin', an' de candle ob Joe am buhnin' low. Dey'll not 'zart yo' ef yo'—'seuse de ol' niggah, Missus, but de mem'ry ob de pas' am too much," he concluded, as he drew the sleeve of his tattered coat across his eyes.

The face of his hearer had grown dreamy and wistful, and there was a deep glow in her eyes, as the words of the old negro carried her back to the time when, in the springtime of life, she presided over a home at the base of the hills which skirt the valley of the Fourteen Mile.

"Ah!" she said dreamily, as she clasped the beautiful child convulsively to her breast; "Joe,

your words take me back to that golden time. Once more do I live over the sacred past, and my soul yearns for the years agone. I cannot bid you stay, and I pray God to reward you for your former faithfulness."

Just then a door to the right was opened, and in the portals stood a vision never to be forgotten. Old Joe bowed with sweeping courtesy, and exclaimed:

"An' heah am de li'l' Missus. Honey, chile, won't yo' took de han' ob ol' Joe? He am pow'ful glad t' see yo'."

Silently the young woman held out her hand.

"May de Gawd ob hebben 'tect yo' an' yohn an' bress yoah life wid all de joys ob dis worl'," said he, bowing low.

With a smile upon her Madonna-like face she moved to a vacant chair, saying simply: "Thank you, Joe."

A shadow of intense sorrow rested upon her lovely face, and the somber mourning robes only tended to enhance her wondrous beauty. As soon as she was seated, the bright-eyed child hurriedly clambered from his grandmother's knee and flew to her, crying: "Mamma, mamma!" She gently lifted him up, and placing his arms about her neck, kissed him fondly. Then the elder lady spoke to old Joe, who stood waiting to be dismissed:

"You will not forget us, Joe."

"'Deed not, Missus; dat am nebbah t' happen long es Joe c'n creep t' yoah doah."

"Well, when you move to your new home, remember that I too used to live on the banks of the Fourteen Mile, said the lady, with a faraway look.

Bowing low, Joe passed out and down to the path leading to his lowly cabin.

CHAPTER VIII

TIME sped on. Days lengthened into weeks, weeks into months. The snows of winter had fallen, shrouding the violets in a cold embrace; the golden leaves were swept from the branches, and lay in heaps upon the ground. The chilly blasts swept down from the hills and sung a requiem over the buried flowers, wailing sadly as it swept on and on.

The first breath of balmy spring fanned the air; the buds began to open; feathered songsters winged their way back from the Southland. The farmer boy was busy turning the rich soil of the valley. The majestic Arkansas, loosened from icy chains, wound its way from its home in the North.

Few changes had taken place about the old Garrison. The lichen and ivy clung about the walls as of yore; the parade grounds were unshorn, except by the scythe of nature.

Joe had long since moved to the valley of the Fourteen Mile; the home of the "old Missus" was unchanged, and the daily life at the Elms, the home of Constance McDowell was very quiet and prosaic. Little Hal grew rapidly, and was soon able to make

long excursions about the place, much to the disgust of Eliza, an aged negress, whose duty it was to look after him, and also to see that the culinary department was kept in order.

Often the boy would go with his mother, when it pleased her to wander about the shady avenues, or dream day-dreams while listening to the soft murmur of the Grand, as it swept onward to the sea.

Hal would sometimes creep close to his mother's side, where she sat beneath the branches of a great willow, and resting his curly head upon her arm, gaze with dreamy eyes toward the distant horizon. Often his childish questions were hushed into silence by the look of sadness which rested upon her sweet face. Gently would she smooth the tangled curls, while her low singing wafted him into dreamland. Then for hours and hours she would remain lost in reverie.

One day, after having spent several hours rambling about the woodland with him, she returned home with her hands laden with flowers—wild flowers gathered from woodland paths. In the sacred recess of her heart lurked memories precious to her alone; and as she gazed at the mass of flowery fragrance held loosely in her hand, her soul longed—aye yearned for the dead-sea fruit which had turned to ashes on her lips; yet had it been offered to her, she would have scorned it.

That evening, while sitting by the window looking out at the bright moonlight, she startled her mother

by asking: "Mamma, has anything ever been heard of Jack Brainard?"

The elderly lady turned hastily around, and adjusting her glasses, replied:

"No, dear; why do you ask?"

"Well, really, mother, I have no interest whatever in knowing, save that it appears rather strange that he should have vanished so completely, does it not?"

"Yes, it does, Constance, but then—well—he has never returned, I am sure. Then you remember the news item, Connie?" she added after a pause.

For some moments nothing but the tick, tick of the small clock broke the stillness, and the shadows obscured the slight look of disappointment which crept over the face of the daughter. The mother regarded her attentively, then turned to answer a childish question of little Hal's.

For possibly an hour they sat in silence, each occupied with thoughts of her own. The boy having become tired of his playthings crept upon a couch and was soon fast asleep. His chubby face framed in a mass of curls glowed in the mellow light, forming a lovely picture of health and innocence.

CHAPTER IX

UNDER the gentle influence of her mother, Constance McDowell became her old radiant self, and with the exception of a matronly dignity, was apparently the same light-hearted girl that she was in the years gone by. She was often even happy, and all the people about the country-side learned to welcome her sunny smile in their homes, and many were the feverish brows that felt the soothing touch of her slender hand.

She was also welcomed to the humble homes of the aged negroes who had come out with her father in the days when the land was new, and they were young and held as slaves. She loved to sit and listen to the quaint stories of the olden time, and hear of the days when the buffalo and the deer ventured within gunshot of their camping-places along the river.

Little Hal had grown to be quite a large boy, and was allowed to ramble at will, accompanied by no other companion than his faithful dog, Prince. They enjoyed many mad races after the cotton-tail in the

woodland. One evening, just after tea, Mrs. Ralston of Old Town, dropped in for an hour's chat.

"Dear me, Constance," she exclaimed, "how very well you do look this evening."

"Thank you, Mrs. Ralston," replied Mrs. McDowell, with a low laugh; "Mamma has said as much within the last hour, and you know," she continued, "mothers' eyes are always under an eclipse."

"Well I never," declared Mrs. Ralston, laughingly, "you two are regular conundrums to the whole town; yes, you are! Now I have just been dying to come and see you, but never seemed to have time until to-day. Something always kept me at home; either the baby, or no help, or some other hindrance; it was really too bad."

Then she discussed the latest styles, her recent experiences while shopping in the city, and finally the choicest morsels of scandal that were going the rounds. Suddenly she said:

"Oh, yes, I forgot to tell you; Charlie Weston came in from the hills to-day where he had been looking for some cattle, and I heard him telling my husband that the Flint Plantation had a new owner and that workmen are at present erecting a splendid mansion on the site of the old one. Yes, indeed! And Charlie says there is no end to the improvement going on out there. My! Who'd have dreamed of such a thing! The Flint Plantation—why, sakes alive! there are dozens near the river that are far more

valuable. Take Con Reynold's farm for instance—why, 'tis worth four times as much."

While Mrs. Ralston was discussing the merits of these several farms, she failed to note the expression of sorrow upon the faces of her listeners.

With this latest item of news, the visitor arose and waited for Mrs. McDowell to bring her wrap. After accompanying her to the gate and politely returning the parting compliments, Constance returned to the house, closed the door, and gently placing her hand on the bowed head of her mother, said:

"So the old Plantation has been sold at last! Well, mother, it was not to be ours. But oh, how I should like to see the old place!"

Her mother making no comment, she continued:

"Mamma, Joe Waitie will come in from the valley one of these days, and then we will know all about it. I shall tell Ned to bring him to see us the next time he comes to town." Slowly the aged woman raised her eyes.

"Connie," she said, "it is dreadful! I had so hoped that the old Plantation would some day be ours again; and that we would once more be permitted to live there in the peaceful valley. I can see again the rugged hills with their stern faces which seem to beckon me; but ah, daughter, it is not to be. It is the will of God, and I bow in humble submission to His wishes."

They sat gazing into the embers, thinking over the past, vainly trying to know the future.

"Good-night, mamma!" said Constance, as she arose, and took up a lighted taper, preparatory to going to her own room.

"Good-night, my dear," replied her mother; but as the younger lady left the room, she caught the glimpse of a pair of savage eyes glowering at her through the window. Her face grew as pale as marble; she trembled violently, and uttering one piercing shriek, fell senseless to the floor.

Instantly the servants who had heard the scream came rushing in. Mrs. Davidson moved swiftly to where her daughter lay, and hastily applied restoratives. In a short time Constance raised up and glared wildly out into the night.

"There! there! O, merciful God! that face! that face!"

"What is it, daughter? What is it? Who—what face?" cried her mother.

Receiving no reply, Mrs. Davidson watched her in alarm. Old Eliza was the first of the servants to reach the scene, and to her son, who came soon after, she said:

"Ceza', yo' jes' go out dar an' see who et am dat come pestificatin' 'roun' heah schain' de young Missus; an' doan yo' come bac' heah tellin' yoah ol' mammy dar ain't nuffin' out dar."

As Cæsar rushed out of the room, his old mother

tenderly lifted Constance from the floor and placed her on a couch, saying:

"Jes' t' t'ink dat de li'l' Missus mus' be done dis wa' ! Ol' 'Liza jes' hope Ceza' 'll cotch dat rascallion an' bring 'im heah wha' 'Liza c'n git huh han's in he haih, I'll bre'k 'is haid fo' 'im suah," then she said to Constance:

"Yo' li'l' gearl, jes' lay still an' doan yo' min' 'bout dat pusson wha' scah yo' in de leas' ; Ceza' 'll be heah in a jiffy, an' tol' us all 'bout 'im, de dog-goned skunk ! Come 'roun' heah scahin' de li'l' gearl like dat ! Yo' jes' let dis ol' 'ooman git huh han's on 'is haid, an' 'Liza'll sho' im' how t' come foolin' 'roun' heah in de da'k. Who wah et, Missus ?"

"Don't ask me that, Eliza ; I cannot tell you."

"Wall, I 'clar' t' goodness, dat am strange," then she continued in an injured tone: "Honey, chile, ain't I yoah mammy—ain't I nuss yo' w'en yo' wah a li'l' tinsy baby ? An' now cain't yo' tol' yoah ol' mammy who et am dat yo' see dar in de da'k ?"

"No, Eliza, I cannot tell ; please draw the blinds, and see that the servants are sent away." With this, she lay back and closed her eyes wearily, as if to shut out all memory of the face that had glared at her with such a cruel expression.

"Did you find any one in the grounds, Cæsar ?" asked Mrs. Davidson of the boy who had returned, and stood panting from exertion, and rolling his eyes in a peculiar manner.

"Missus, dar wa'n't nuffin' out dar dat I see but jes' de da'k; do, I heah sump'n' go lopin off down in de woods, an' w'en de soun's mos' stop, som'n laugh, an' I heah a v'ice com'n' f'om de ribbah, an' et say," de negro, added with awe, "'member de bendettah, 'member de bendettah,' den all wah still, jes' a' owl go who-oo, who-oo, down dah in de lowlan's," he said in a whisper to his mother, who solemnly shook her head, and peered furtively around.

"Who-oo, who-oo!" came the cry, as if in answer to the words of Cæsar. Old Eliza heard it and muttered under her breath:

"May de good Lawd hab mussy; dar am trubble out dar in de night, an' sorrah hubbabs ovah de home ob de li'l' pansy blossom," then she said to her son, "Ceza', jes' yo' go t' de cabin of yoah muddah, an' put de pot on de fiah, 'caze she mus' read de signs in de cup onc't mo'—may de good Lawd hab mussy."

Again the mournful cry came from the marshes, and as the sound reached the ears of Constance McDowell, she started up, her eyes wild, and her face drawn with intense suffering, while her lips repeated the words, "Remember the vendetta, remember the vendetta; My God! those are the words of Bart Nelson," then clinging convulsively to her old mammy, she found relief in a flood of tears.

Mrs. Davidson sat by the fading firelight, a troubled expression upon her face, while into her eyes came a look of Christian fortitude. The room was

still; fantastic shadows played about the dark background. Old Eliza sat silent and unseen except for the white turban which made her black head conspicuous.

Mrs. Davidson said to her: "You may assist your young mistress to her room, then return to me."

CHAPTER X

"ELIZA, many long years have passed since we came here. I have found my burden heavy, and were it not for the uplifting power granted the Christian soul and the precious promises of an all-wise God, I would not have borne them. It seems but yesterday that we steamed up the turbid waters of the Arkansas and pitched our tents beneath the swaying branches of the forest. Then sorrow and heartache were unknown to me, and my whole being thrilled with the buoyancy of hopeful youth.

"Hunters and trappers came to our door and were cordially welcomed on their journey westward. The tide of civilization was advancing rapidly; vast herds of buffalo and antelope were receding to the hills beyond the river. Ah, those were halcyon days—days of perfect peace, and the valley of the Fourteen Mile became a part of my very life; and the old Flint Plantation a garden of Eden; but now, Eliza, it has gone under the hammer, and a stranger sleeps in the old home—is master of the lands that once were mine."

Mrs. Davidson's voice became low and tremulous; a sadness too deep for tears settled upon her, and a

sob shook her frame. Gently, Eliza put out one of her long bony hands and fondly clasped the waxen fingers of her mistress, while tears rolled down her furrowed cheeks.

"Missus, yoah heeht am sadder'n de wind dat moan fru de lim's ob de trees out dar in de fores'; but lis'n to yoah ol' slabe, whose heeht bleeds fo' yo'. Doan de good Lawd say, 'Come all dat am weak an' hebby lad'n, an' I'll gib yo' res'?' Yas, He do, an' we mus' place our trus' in Him, Missus, for He am de one dat dribes awa' de sorrah ob dis earf." Then after a pause, she continued:

"'Deed Missus, yo' am right; fo' et hab be'n long sense de ol' Ma'se brung us f'om de Souflan. Den, Missus, yo' wah a li'l' gearl. I wah bigger'n yo', an' yoah faddah say t' me,' 'Liza, yo' stan' by yoah young Missus; yo' mus' 'ten' huh f'om de 'ginnin' t' de en',' an' Missus, dar hain't be'n a day dat 'Liza hab not be'n wid yo'.

"Well do I 'member de day w'en de ol' Ma'se come to yoah muddah who am wid de angels now, bress her! an' say, 'I hab sol' de plantation; de boat am et de wha'f an' we mus' tuhn our face t'ards de settin' sun.' De ol' Missus, yoah muddah—tuhn white-lak', an' tuhn huh face t' de windah an' look, an' look, den she say t' me, 'Liza, go tell yoah mammy t' come heah.' I wen', an' w'en mammy come, I slide int' de room behin' huh, an' heah wha' de ol' Missus say.

"She say, 'M'randy, de Ma'se hab sol' de ol' home, an' we am gwine in de 'rection ob de settin' sun wha' dar am gol' in de san's ob de ribbah.

"'Yo' mus' 'tend t' eberty'ing an' see dat dey all gets abo'd de boat in de mahn'n', 'den she tuhn awa' an' I see a teah drap on huh lace wisban'. Huh eyes wah tuhned t'ards de restin' place ob huh firs' bohn, fo' de li'l' rosebud wah sleepin' out in de ya'd undah de swayin' branches ob an ol' willow tree.

"Den she call all de house niggahs, an' dey come wid my granfaddah et dey haid, an' w'en ol' Missus speak t' dem, she say:

"'Napoleon, we am gwine t' lef' de ol' plantation; yoah Ma'se hab sol' et, an' t'morra mahn'n' de boat mus' carry us awa'. Dar am cu'yus t'ings gwine on awa' down yondah on de ribbah, an' de time hab come w'en we mus' lef' de homes ob our birt. Yo' mus' he'p yoah Ma'se an' git all de t'ings ready fo' de wa' am long, an' time am sho't. No mo'll yoah happy songs be hea'd on de banks ob de Mississip, fo' we am gwine yondah, an' we'll mak' our home t' de norf-wes'."

"All day long, de niggahs wah a-runnin' heah an' yondah, an' a-takin' de furnichure an' house t'ings t' de wha'f. Some ob de picaninnies fotch de hosses, odahs fotch de cows, an' de hull place wah alibe wid de hurry ob leabin' de ol' home. De ol' Ma'se wah a-stan'in' dah on de bank ob de ribbah an' gib odahs how t' load de steamah, an' w'en dey wah slow, he'd

damn t'ings black wid cuss wo'ds, an' 'clar he'd lebe de triflin' niggahs dah t' starbe. Oh, I tol' yo', Missus, dah wah such a rumpus es wah nebbah befo', but et las' all de prop'ty wah loaded, de stock wah led on, an' de niggahs counted es dey run de gang plank. In de mahn'n', de niggahs wah all counted onct mo', an' Ma'se gib de signal dat fotch us t' de blue watahs ob de wes'. Our frien's come t' de landin' place t' see de boat staht, an' t' wabe us a fahwell f'om de sho'. Ebery eye wah tuhned t'ards de ol' home dat wah soon t' fade int' de pas', an' de heahts ob us all wah sad.

"Ol' Ma'se an' ol' Missus stood on de hurrican' deck wid teahs streamin' down dey cheeks, an' as de boat puff awa' f'om de wha'f, an' down pas' de qua'tahs, we see de people on de bank wavin' dey han's an' cryin', den de deah ol' Missus put huh ahms 'roun' de neck ob de ol' Ma'se, an' hide huh bu'ful face on his bres'.

"At dat time, Missus, yo' wah young—t' young t' 'zern t'ings lak' yo' do now, an' yo' wah happy; yoah heaht wah light, an' de sun always shined. Fo' days an' days, de boat puff down de stream, an' one mahn'n' we come t' de mouf ob anoddah ribbah; de boat wah swung 'roun', an' den we tuhned into de muddy wattahs ob de Arkansas, an' de wheels whiz wid a new haid ob steam dat de eng'neer tuhned on, an' we plough up de willow-fringed banks fo' miles an' miles.

“Nebbah in all my bohn days’ll I fo’git the trip up dat ribbah. All day long de blac’ smoke ’d roll f’om de tall chimn’ys; de niggahs spent dey time cuttin’ de pig’n wing an’ tuhned de han’ sprung, an’ w’en de sun hung low in the wes’, some ob dem ’d sing de ol’ songs dat dey ustah sing down on de ol’ plantation. Den Isaiah ’d pray an’ sing ’ligious songs ’till de night wah fa’ gone, an’ de breff ob de ribbah ’come cool, den dey’d creep awa’, an’ silence ’d claim de hours; nuffin’ but de chug, chug ob de wheels c’d be hea’d es de boat crept on an’ on in de middle ob de channel.

“Durin’ de wahm summah days, de ol’ Ma’s e an’ de ol’ Missus ’d sit on de dec’ an’ look at de sho’s, an’ et de w’ite homes ob de plantation owners dat libed on bof sides ob de stream. At las’, de banks ’gin t’ grow wil’, an’ woah a ’zarted look, an’ ob nights de cryin’ ob de varmints kep’ us still ’n mice.

“One day w’en we hed be’n on de ribbah fo’ foah weeks o’ mo’, we come t’ a li’l town built right ’long de bank; jes’ one long row ob houses made ob logs an’ plank; dah wah one street to de li’l town an’ de Ma’s e say dat et am Van Buren; dah de boat stop fo’ mo’n an hour an’ yoah faddah go on de sho’, an’ come bac’, an’ I heah ’im say t’ yoah muddah dat et wah unly one hunnerd miles t’ wha’ he gwine t’ camp; an’ she say, ‘I’m so glad! I’m so glad!’ Den onct mo’ de bell ging’l, an’ great clouds ob smoke wah belched out by de engine, an’ de las’ hunnerd mile be-

curren' an' down de shimmerin' wabes, de wo'ds ob 'De Girl I Lef' Behin' come weepin' fru de aih; fo' a minit all wah still, den de niggahs on de sho' catch up de wo'ds an' de woodlan' rung wid de notes ob de ol' song. Ol' Ma'se stood wid his hat in his han' an' one ahm 'bout de wais' ob yoah muddah, an' as de boat mak' de ben' in de ribbah, he say, 'Fahwell, fahwell!' Missus, de 'Idlewil' wah gone—gone bac' t' de Souflan'—an' t' de clusterin' Magnolias on de banks ob de Mississip'. Ouah heahts wah sad, an' all day de camp wah silen' as ef deff wah hubberin' 'roun'.

"De weeks pas'; ol' Ma'se 'd go out in de woods an' be gone all day, an' some time two or free days, but at las' he come bac' an' say t' de ol' Missus, 'Come wid me!' Yo' say, 'Mamma, c'n I go wid yo'?' an' she say, 'Yas!' Den yo' call me an' say, 'Liza, yo' c'n go wid us int' de woods.'

"Ol' Ma'se tuhn his face t' de Eas', an' w'en we come t' de hi'es' place, he p'int t' de hills an' say, 'Dah am de valley wha we mus' buil' ouah home.' Fo' a long time de ol' Missus look, an' at las' wid a sweet smile on huh face, she say, 'Oh, et am b'u-ful!' Den ol' Ma'se led us bac' t' de camp on de ribbah; we hed seen de valley ob de 'Fo'teen Mile.'

"Wid de firs' light ob mahn'n', ol' Ma'se an' de niggahs go t' de valley an' all day long, de ring ob de axes come floatin' t' ouah eahs. Soon de house fo' de w'ite folks wah built; de quattahs fo' de nig-

gahs too, an' den dey went t' clearin' an' 'pared t' plant de cohn an' de sog'um cane.

"All wah happy den, an' time went by wid wings. De yeahs pas', an' befo' we re'lize de fac', yo' had grown int' a bu'ful young lady. Yoah bruddahs wah dah, an' w'en de trappers come by on de wes'ward trail, dey eyes 'd sparkle wid de longin' fo' de wil' lan' ob de settin' sun. Dey soon tuhn dey faces t' de huntin' groun's ob de Pawnee an' de Osage, an' dey lef' de home in de valley ob de 'Fo'teen Mile'; dey went t' de 'sterious lan' wha de hunters say dey would fin' gol'. Missus, dey am dah yet, but de good Lawd am lookin' obah dem, an', honey, w'en we all 'semble on de banks ob de New Jerusalem, dey'll come out 'n de distance an' welcome yo' home wid a glad smile, an' den yoah heaht 'll be lighter'n a feddah.

"Den, Missus, I 'members de day w'en Ma'se Davidson come co'tin' de belle ob de valley. I c'n see 'im now as he ustah ride up t' de gate wid his face bright, an' his eyes sparklin', an' his han's all a-tremblin', as he cotch a look ob yoah face f'om de connah ob de poach. Yoah heaht wah his'n f'om de firs', an' w'en yo' marry 'im, 'Liza follah yo' t' yoah new home, an' we wah happy as de li'l' bi'ds in de trees.

"But some time de clouds come an' sorrah wrung de bosoms ob all. De ol' Missus went firs', den in de spring, ol' Ma'se wah called t' de odah worl', an' de home in de valley wah sad. De procl'mation ob Ma'se Linkum free de blac' man, dey go out in de

worl' jes' same es a ship without a ruddah, or a rig'ment widout a gin'ral t' 'come de mos' wuffless kin' ob human bein's undah de sun. But 'Liza 'members de wo'ds ob de ol' Ma'se w'en we libed in de deah ol' Souflan', an' stay by de li'l' Missus. Ol' Joe he stay, an' Chloe nebbah 'zart yo' in de houah ob 'stremity. De li'l' Constance wah bohn an' had grown t' be a bu'ful chile an' yo' wah as happy as de bumble-bee hubberin' 'bout de clobah.

"Ebery mahn'n', de boom ob de gun c'd be hea'd es et come boundin' 'cross de prairie, an' de faint soun's ob de bugle whispered fru de vales ob de Fo'teen Mile. At las' de sojers wah sent t' de wes' t' hunt Geronimo t' his hole, an' de ol' fo't wah gib up t' de bats an' de owls.

"T'ings went well wid us in de valley fo' de longes'; at las' de li'l' Constance wah a young lady, an' wah de belle ob de Lan'!" Here the voice of Eliza became low, and she added, "Den, Missus, ah, den, come de shaddah; den come de sohrah ob deff to wring yoah heaht, an' cas' its influence obah yoah home.

"Den come de debbil Bart Nelson wid his han'some face an' debblish ways—den come Ma'se Jack Brainard, who lubed ouah li'l' gearl; den de las' ob all, de fatal telegraf f'om de dis'ant lan' dat steal de roses f'om de cheeks ob ouah li'l' blossom, an' cause huh t' pine awa' an' weep wid de bitterness ob huh life.

"An' now aftah all dese long yeahs hab gone, af-

tah de li'l' Missus come home f'om de Norf wid huh li'l' chile, an' huh heah sad wid a lastin' pang, den et seems wrong t' trus' de worl' fo' happiness.

"Ten yeah, ten long, long yeah hab flown on de wings ob 'ternity sinse Ma'se Brainard went awa'—de Lawd only kno's wha'. Yes, Missus, et am ten long yeah t'night sinse he went out 'n de night nebbah t' retuhn. De groun's in de cup p'int t' 'sterious t'ings, an' de hoo-oo, hoo-oo-in' ob de screech-owl down yondah in de marshes tol' me dat trubble—trubble am hangin' obah de li'l' gearl."

The last words of the old negress were filled with that peculiar intonation calculated to soothe the hearer. Memory's sacred recess was unlocked, and the years flitted by in a misty panorama. Once more she lived with her Mistress as in the days of the golden past; and her heart yearned for the scenes of the long ago.

Her Mistress sat listlessly with her gaze fixed upon the flickering embers. The night was far spent and yet they lingered, each dreaming of that time which comes but once in this life, and which when past, is the most sacred memory of the days that are no more.

CHAPTER XI

THE pictures of the past so vividly drawn by the old servant caused Mrs. Davidson to linger, and to be so lost to her present surroundings that she did not hear a soft cat-like tread in the hall, hence was wholly unprepared, when the door was swung rudely open and a man stood by the entrance of her sitting-room. His face was hidden by the shadows cast by the fire which had burned low, and the eyes of the two women could not see the evil look of the intruder. Dressed in the picturesque fashion of the roving class that infested the frontier, he made a startling apparition in the semi-light of the room. The old darkey arose to her feet, saying to her Mistress:

"Missus, yo' sit still, an', I'll 'ten' 't dis gem'n," and with this, said to the midnight prowler:

"Who am yo', sah?"

"What is that to you?" retorted the stranger.

"Wha' am dat t' me, yo' skunk? Et am 'nuff, dat yo' had bettah tol' me, befo' I hab Ceza' t' fro' yo' out'n de windah."

"You will do nothing of the kind; and if you raise any disturbance, I will throttle you," hissed the man.

"De good Lawd heah 'im," murmured the old negress, now thoroughly alarmed. "Well, sah, wha' do yo' want heah et dis time ob night?"

"It happens to be the time best suited for me to call, and that is enough." With this, the man walked warily into the room and closed the door. Mrs. Davidson started up in alarm at the boldness of his actions, and essayed to rise to her feet. Noticing this, the intruder said in a voice which sounded strangely familiar:

"Please keep your seat, Madam."

Eliza then moved to a position near the chair of her Mistress, and left Mrs. Davidson confronting the unwelcome visitor.

"Well, sir," she said, her eyes flashing angrily, "Will you please be so kind as to state your business?"

"Madam, you will pardon me for visiting your home in this unseemly fashion, but the fact is, I had hoped that I should find no one up to receive me, though since such is the case, I am not averse to telling you that this is the only time I can find it convenient to call," the last with irony in his voice. Then helping himself to a chair, which he placed so as to command the entrance, and with a glance at the windows, seated himself.

Old Eliza was becoming very much excited, and stood at the back of her Mistress' chair; for the latter

had begun to tremble so violently, she was compelled to resume her seat, but nerved herself to say:

"Since you have presumed so much, will you kindly state your errand and be as expeditious as possible? It is quite late, and we desire to retire."

The very contempt and loathing in her voice and manner stung the intruder, and a savage gleam came into his eyes as he viewed her from under his dark bushy brows. He clutched the arms of his chair, as he replied:

"Very well; since you insist, I will tell you that my business here has nothing to do with yourself."

"Who, then, pray, if not with the mistress of the house?"

"Your question is superfluous in the extreme," smiled the man, his teeth gleaming wickedly, while a diabolic laugh rang out upon the stillness of the room.

"Mrs. Davidson, there is no use keeping up this farce any longer. I see that you have not identified me, therefore, know that Bart Nelson is before you."

At mention of that dread name, old Eliza straightened herself until she appeared to grow several inches taller, and muttered: "May de Lawd hab mussy! De screech-owl tol' de truff onct mo'."

"Silence! you huzzy! Speak another word and I'll choke the life out of you. I am not to be trifled with," snarled Nelson, then continued: "Yes, Mrs. Davidson, I have returned to fulfil my mission, for

by the gods! I remember the old days. The time for reaping my long-delayed vengeance is at hand; then—well then, I will go again, never to return. Do you hear—never again to return to this cursed place where life is a hell and darkness alone is meted to me.”

“You are raving. How dare you address me in such a manner as this?”

“I dare anything, Madam. You must realize that I have fully weighed the cost of my being apprehended by those human jackals—officers of the law as you are pleased to term them. Bah! they are a cowardly set, and honest men would shun them if they knew as much as I. My mission here at this time is, to secure the papers that you have held over my head so long. Curse the luck! I have been unable to find them; I have searched every nook and corner of the library. Now, Madam, do you understand; am I sufficiently plain?”

At the mention of the papers, the mind of Mrs. Davidson reverted to a little cabinet in her daughter's room which contained them. “Indeed, then, your visit is not so successful as you had anticipated?”

“No; but remember it is several hours until morning, and that leaves me plenty of time to look for them.”

At this threat, Mrs. Davidson paled slightly, but succeeded in suppressing all signs of emotion.

"Those papers are beyond your reach, Bart Nelson, and your hands will never hold them again. You villain! the time has come when there should not be the slightest semblance of mercy shown you!"

"Ha, ha!" chuckled the outlaw. "The papers may be out of my reach, but, Madam, you forget that the child of your daughter sleeps in the room of the east wing, and he will serve as a substitute for the papers."

"Brute!" screamed Mrs. Davidson, as she realized the desperate character of the man before her.

"Yes, Madam, little Hal will do. Once let me get him in my power, then I shall be able to dictate my own terms in regard to some matters that we are both acquainted with."

As he finished speaking, he arose to his feet, and advancing to the door opened it, and standing for a moment in the passage, said:

"Remember, this is not the end of the matter; and your scorn had better been withheld."

The key was in the lock and he quickly changed it to the outside; then lifting his hat in mock courtesy, he closed and locked the door, leaving the women in a condition where it was impossible to summon help.

CHAPTER XII

MRS. DAVIDSON and her faithful but helpless servant waited in an agony of suspense for the worst, which they were powerless to prevent. Soon they heard little Hal screaming loudly, followed by piercing shrieks from Mrs. McDowell.

"Remember the 'vendetta,' Constance McDowell! My hour of revenge is near, and you may turn to the man for whom you spurned me, and see if he is able to help you in your extremity. Curse him! His blood shall yet be drunk by the sands; a thousand curses on his head!"

As he uttered these fierce words, the frightened woman was clinging frantically to her child, whom he held in one arm, while with the free hand was endeavoring to unfasten a window whereby he could make his escape.

In the excitement, the purport of his words were lost on Constance, for she was only trying to save her child. He soon succeeded in opening the window, and with a savage wrench of her arm he sent her reeling away from him, and springing out on the veranda, made his way hastily along the front of the

house, soon reaching a ladder which he had placed in a convenient position before entering.

By this time all was confusion. The door of Mrs. Davidson's room had been forced by the servants. They found old Eliza wringing her hands, and crying; while Mrs. Davidson was too stunned to reason clearly.

As soon as she was able to grasp the situation, she had her daughter brought down-stairs where restoratives were hastily applied, but the second fright had proven too much for her overwrought nerves and it was a long while before she opened her eyes. When she did so, she looked all around for her boy.

"Oh God! my son! my son! save him!" she cried, as her mother in broken accents told her that Bart Nelson had carried the child away to the hills with him.

Meanwhile, Cæsar had been dispatched for aid, and presently a troop of men dashed up to the door. The leader hurried to Mrs. Davidson who told him all the particulars of the abduction.

"The devil! Bart Nelson!" ejaculated Heck Talbot, as he asked numerous questions. As soon as all was made plain to him, he went to his men and told them to dismount, saying:

"Thar's not a darned bit of use'n follerin' thet varment now; we'd only blur the trail. More'n likely, he's made for the hills, and if he has, well then, it'll be a hard job ter git him. Boys, if he gits ou^t thar,

in the Rabbit Trap kentry, it'll be h—— to git 'im out. Git down offen yer hosses, an' we'll camp here till mornin' an' then start fer ther hills North uv Tahlequah.

The morning following the abduction of little Hal by the notorious outlaw, Bart Nelson, a man wearing a heavy mustache and dressed in a neat suit of tweed, alighted from the south-bound Katy Flyer at Muscogee, and asked to be shown a place where he could obtain transportation to the Garrison, some miles east.

At this moment, the veteran stage driver swung his leaders into the street leading eastward, and sang out in his usual garrulous manner:

"All aboa'd for der riffer!" Hailing him, the stranger deposited his valise in the bottom of the stage, and clambering up beside the driver, waited patiently for him to push in the direction of the river. Seeing there were no more passengers, old Hans settled down for the drive. As he pulled in his horses, he urged them down the straggling street, and they were soon reeling off the distance which intervened between them and the distant fringe of timber which lined the river for miles and miles. When the outskirts of the town were reached, Hans lifted his long lash and cracked it viciously about the heads of his leaders, and away they rolled across a beautiful prairie dotted with comfortable ranch houses, and great herds browsing upon the luxuriant herbage,

their mild eyes gazing sleepily at the coach as it passed them.

The stage had proceeded but three miles when the top of a hill was reached whence passengers could obtain a splendid view of the surrounding country. Away to the left, resting upon a slight eminence, was the "Mission of the Sacred Heart;" beyond which could be seen the shimmering waves of the river, as it wound its way from the northwest and became lost in the dense growth of timber which spread its verdure out before them.

To the eastward could be descried the faint outlines of the Green Leaf Hills which clave the horizon like the jagged teeth of a huge saw. In the distant west, beyond Pecan Creek, the Twin Hills reared their woody crests to the heavens; while a wide undulating prairie stretched out for miles and miles in the direction of the Canadian and Deep Fork.

As the scene was presented to the passenger, who sat silent by the side of the driver, he cast a wistful glance in every direction. Hans had stopped to rest his horses, which gave an opportunity to gaze at the magnificent panorama. The travelers inside the coach were loud in their praise of the limitless landscape, but the man on the seat remained mute, his face turned to the east.

After the horses had rested sufficiently to quiet the conscience of the driver, he urged them into a swing-

ing trot down the long slant that led to the river. In another hour they reached the bank of the turbid stream, and soon were on board the ferry which conveyed them to the opposite shore where they entered a forest of cotton-wood and thorn-trees.

When they had gone something less than a mile, the forms of two or three men appeared on the road ahead, barring farther passage.

"Got in himmel!" muttered the driver, with unmistakable German accent; "dat vas somedings vat I gannot understoot," and pulling on his reins, cried "Voa! by der deffil, dar vas a skrew loose somevere. Voa! Holt on!"

By this time they were close enough for one of the party to cry out: "Come on, Dutch; it is not the old gang." Hans's face immediately lighted with a different expression, and he once more cracked his lash and drew up to where the men stood under the trees.

"Vell! vat is der matter mit yer?"

"Matter 'nuff," answered the spokesman; "matter 'nuff. Ther devil's to pay over et ther Garrison. Bart the renegade, is back and at his old tricks. Heck Talbot sent us down here to watch ther ferry and see that he does not cross here, and the rest of ther gang went down ther river ter head 'im off thar."

"Vell, vell! Der deffil vill gommence dot olt game mit me no more. I haf peen all der time dinking dat I vou'd lay off, an' so he'p me, ven der stage bulls

out in der evening, I will have der golic—Och! Got in himmel, vat vas dat Ba't Nelson gommittin' vonct more dis time?" asked Hans uneasily, as he remembered the many times that the banditti had held him up, and robbed the mails, and the passengers as well.

"Wall, ther d—— rascal has turned on an 'oman this time, an' has almost been the cause o' her death. Yas, by th' eternal, he went t' th' 'Elms' las' night, an' carried little Hal McDowell off ter th' hills 'ith 'im, an' Heck an' ther res' o' ther gang is now trailin' 'im, in th' d'rection o' ther Rattlesnake. Hit seems as ef he's makin' fer ther Flint Hills an' ther Rabbit Trap Kentry."

At the first mention of Bart Nelson, the passenger sitting by the side of the driver became all attention, and as the conversation proceeded, his lips were drawn tightly together while his dark somber eyes gleamed with a dangerous light, his hands clinched spasmodically, and his form assumed an upright posture.

"Thet's all I c'n tell ye, Dutch," concluded the speaker, as he reined his horse back from the road, permitting the coach to pass.

"Vell, py tam, vat more vou't you vish t' dell one vat has te mails of Ungle Sam down mit der boot of der stage, unt passengers, too," called Hans, while a sickly smile crossed his weather-beaten face, and ended in a grimace of disgust, as he swung into the

bend in the road, and away through the dark overhanging branches.

For a time, there was a lull in the conversation. All the passengers were thankful that they had not been requested to hand over their valuables and money, then began to discuss the strenuous efforts made by the Government to rid the country of such characters as they deemed Bart Nelson and his followers to be.

As Hans drew near the little village, he grew very loquacious and detailed at much length the escapades of the man who had carried off the child of Mrs. McDowell, and who by this time was hiding among the hills of Rattlesnake and Spavinaw Creeks.

Old Hans's silent passenger was Jack Brainard, who was returning after a lapse of two years with the purpose of locating permanently at his new home on the plantation, over which Joe Waitie had been presiding since his departure from the Garrison.

Soon after the plantation had passed into his possession, Jack sent a reliable contractor who within a short while had the new residence well on towards completion. Old Joe having been sworn to secrecy as to the name of the owner, refrained from answering any of the numerous questions propounded by those who wondered at his change of fortune. Time sped merrily for Joe, and he took a keen delight in assuming authority over the other tenants on the plantation.

"Yo' bettah min' yoah work, les' I hab de boss tuh'n yo' outen yoah house," and with this, he would strut about with expanded chest, wearing a look of importance which greatly exasperated them.

Months passed swiftly away. A letter was received by the foreman announcing that the owner would arrive within the next fortnight, and would expect everything to be ready for his permanent occupancy. The time had arrived for him to come, and every one was on the *qui vive* to be the first to welcome the new "Ma'se." Old Chloe bustled about the kitchen with all the importance of the principal chef.

The plantation had indeed undergone wonderful changes, and it appeared as if Aladdin's lamp had wrought the wonder. The broad acres had been cleared of their tangled growth; new houses had been erected for the tenants, and all the buildings belonging to the mansion were commodious and complete in every respect. The fields were inclosed in wire fences, yet the center of attraction was the residence of the master.

Stately rooms hung with costly tapestries gave an Oriental finish to the apartments. French windows opened out on wide verandas. Electric bells sounded at the slightest touch, and at night numberless lights glittered like diamonds.

Of all the rooms, the library, to a student, was the most attractive; the shelves were lined with volumes from every part of the globe. Altogether, the house

would suggest the idea of a Fifth Avenue "brown stone front" transplanted into the wilderness.

Old Joe was becoming restless, wandering from one part of the domain to another, and finally stood by the dining-room door where Chloe was trying to add additional luster to the gilded knobs.

"Joey, did de Ma'se say dat he'd suah be heah dis ebenin'?"

"Dat wha' he say in his letter t' Mistah Zielowsky de fo'man," answered Joe.

"Well den, et am 'bout time he wah heah," and stopping to listen, said:

"Et 'pears lak' I heah de rumble ob de car'age comin' down de road."

And so it proved; for as Joe rushed excitedly to the door, he saw Brainard alight from the conveyance and dismiss the driver. Joe hobbled down the steps, and clasping the hand of his master, exclaimed:

"Ma'se Jack! Yo' am welcome t' de valley ob de Fo'teen Mile," and taking his traveling bag, he deposited it in the hall.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN Bart Nelson sprang from the ladder, and rushed away in the darkness bearing in his arms the struggling form of little Hal, he looked up at the heavens and taking his course by a star, sped away in a northeasterly direction, and was soon skirting the banks of the River Grand.

"Keep quiet, you young cub!" he said to the boy, shaking him vigorously, when he uttered a faint cry, then muttered savagely to himself:

"Now, by all the gods! we will see who wins in the game of chance. Once let me get to the hills, and I can defy all the bloodhounds they may choose to send after me. There, once, the gang will see that the blood-suckers are held in check until I can make the necessary preparations for leaving the country." Looking down at the frightened face of the child, he hissed: "Yes, to leave the country, and take you with me to a place where you will never be known, and where no one can reach you."

The child looked at him with wild-eyed anguish, and his lips trembled, as his scantily clad form shivered in the cold breath of morning.

For miles and miles Bart Nelson held his course, using every endeavor to hide his trail by doubling on his tracks, and skipping from rock to rock when that were possible. He traveled until noon. And then laid down under a ledge of rock to rest, for he was worn out with his rapid walk; also, with carrying the child.

He remained there until evening, when he again resumed his journey in the direction of the north-east. When the twilight deepened he sought a trail which he knew would lead to where he wished to cross the Double Spring, and finding it, strode swiftly through the night.

Coming to a small cabin in a secluded part of the country, he stopped and obtained some refreshment for himself and the child, then pushed on towards the hills, striving to keep out of the way of any human habitation.

All night he trudged exultingly along, often feeling a strange tenderness for the boy in his arms. When the gray streaks of dawn were visible in the east, he reached a wild wooded spot in the hills, where he paused and assumed a listening attitude for several moments.

Little Hal had fallen asleep from sheer exhaustion, where his captor had laid him upon a mass of leaves, and his fair young face made a beautiful setting for the foliage. As the long lashes rested upon the olive-tinted cheeks, he slept, perhaps to dream of his

mother's evening kiss. Nelson gazed at him with a tinge of emotion upon his savage face.

"How like! how like!" he muttered, as he gazed hungrily at the boy so much the image of his mother, then lifting his eyes as if seeking counsel from the silent heavens, he repeated: "Heavens and earth! How like! He has her eyes, her hair, her sweet dreamy look, her very features. May the tortures of hell seize the soul of Jack Brainard; robber, thief, devil, for stealing her from me." His voice had lost its tender cadence, sinking into a growl similar to that of a wild beast. Then shaking his clinched hand in the direction of the dimly outlined hills to the south, muttered:

"Aye, curse you, Jack Brainard! Ye think that Bart Nelson does not know who is the owner of the Flint Plantation, but he does; and Jack Brainard, beware! beware! for the Nemesis of hell is on your trail!" Having poured forth this bitter invective, he walked some paces from where the boy lay, and placing his finger to his lips, blew one long shrill whistle, and presently the distant hoo, hoo of an owl was heard coming from the mountain-side some distance away. Again, he sent the piercing blast caroling through the gloom, and again a similar sound was heard in response, much nearer than before.

"That you, Captain?" queried a voice, which seemed close to the spot where Bart Nelson stood.

"Yes, Hank, it's me."

Then the owner of the voice stepped from behind a large boulder and approaching Nelson, said: "Glad t' see you, Cap'n!"

"'Spose so," sententiously replied Nelson. "How's the boys?"

"All right, Cap'n. Jim and Bill 've gone ter the line fer a s'ply of tangle-foot, an'll be back ter-marrar night ef nothin' don't happen."

"Dam poor business that!" growled Nelson. "A drunken man is worse than a jackass. First thing they know, they'll be on the run, and the whole gang will have to change location. Curse the tangle-foot; it has sent many a good man to his long home at the end of a hemp rope," he concluded, savagely, as if some remembrance of the past galled him into bitterness.

"Here! You gather up this boy, and fetch him to camp; my arms are so tired that I can't hold anything; I've carried him all the way. Handle him carefully, too; and mind you, if you harm a hair of his head I'll blow your brains out."

"All right, Cap'n; you carry this rifle, an' I'll tote the kid," said the man, who was a low-browed villainous looking specimen of humanity.

Having disposed of his gun, he lifted the boy from his bed of leaves and was soon following Nelson down the side of the mountain. After moving several hundred yards they reached what, to a casual ob-

server, would appear a tangled mass of vines through which it would apparently be impossible for a rabbit to go. Placing his fingers on his lips, Nelson emitted a chirp resembling the call of a cat-bird. Instantly, the wall of foliage swayed and disclosed a yawning aperture in the side of the hill. Nelson advanced boldly into the gloom, which proved to be a huge cavern delved out of the solid rock of the mountain as if by Titanic hands.

Noisy revelry came floating to his ears as he moved swiftly along the vaulted passage. Turning a bend in the subterranean depths, he suddenly stepped into the midst of his followers. Instantly all sprang to their feet and reached for their rifles which were within convenient distance, as they were always ready to repulse an attack from any quarter. Seeing that it was their leader, they shouted until the cave rang with the sound and then tumbled over each other in their haste to be the first to shake hands with him and congratulate him upon his safe return. In a moment more their companion came in bearing in his arms little Hal who was still sleeping.

"Well, I'll be damned!" muttered a dark-browed villain, as his eyes rested upon the curly head of the boy.

"Ther Cap'n's maddern a March hare. I'm cuttin' out'n this at onct, fer ther's a woman in the case an' this kid'll bring a whole legion up through ther hills. I've no idee uv lookin' up a lim' yit, so by

ther great horn spoon, I'm quittin' this ranch on ther run."

Nelson noticed the looks of suprise that rested upon the faces of the wild crew, and as if divining their thoughts, said: "Well, boys, you see that we have a new member to-night, and I want to tell you that he is to be respected by every one of the gang for he is my own special charge, and I expect each one of you fellows to do your part towards keeping him in the dark and seeing that he does not depart by ways and means unknown to yourselves."

"All right, Cap'n;" they answered in chorus; "you are the boss o' this ranch, an' them as don't like ther kid can vamoose."

"Three cheers fer ther kid and ther Cap'n!" said one of the motley crew, who appeared to be second in command, and whose features did not belie his avocation. Instantly the cavern rang with yells that reverberated through the underground chambers.

CHAPTER XIV

WHILE Nelson was threading his way through the defiles of the trackless region of the Rattlesnake, a far different scene was being enacted in the home of little Hal. Morning had dawned bright and beautiful; not a cloud obscured the heavens, and the early day was resonant with the songs of birds.

Men with stern faces upon which was written settled determination, were hurrying to and fro with restless activity. Horses stood tethered to the trees about the Elms, while some were grazing upon the crisp grass which sparkled with dewdrops. These men were waiting impatiently for their chief to come from the station, when he would lead them through the swamps and over the hills to the country supposed to be the hiding-place of Nelson and his gang of cut-throats.

Every rifle had been examined; the locks of each Colt had been tested, for it often meant swift death when a shell became jammed or refused to explode at the critical moment. In a short time, Heck Talbot came galloping up the hill, and with a few hurried words to the excited women he and his little

band filed away over the hills and sought the valley of the Grand. In front of the cavalcade was an Indian with his eyes fixed steadily on the ground. His sight, so perfectly trained, detected a slight depression in the soft alluvial as he moved steadily through the dense undergrowth.

Constance McDowell watched the last one of her friends disappear over the brow of the hill, then turned sadly to her mother who led her to the library and placed her in a reclining chair. The little village was all astir over the act of the bandit, and not a man would have refused to follow the lead of Heck Talbot had his aid been needed.

While Constance and her mother were sitting in their gloom and loneliness, some one knocked at the door. "Come in!" called Mrs. Davidson, and the door was opened by Joe Waitie.

"Why Joe!" she exclaimed in surprise, "what brings you here?"

At mention of Joe's name, Mrs. McDowell looked up, her eyes red with weeping. At sight of her sorrowful face, the soul of faithful old Joe was filled with sympathy.

"Missus," he said, "et am some time since de ol' niggah wah t' see yo', an' dis mahn'n', Ma'se Raymon' say dat I c'd come obah an' git some t'ings, an' I jes' sed t' mysel' dat I'd come t' see de li'l' gearl an' de ol' Missus."

"Well Joe, we are very glad you have come, for it

seems strange not to have you and Aunt Chloe around as we used to," said Mrs. Davidson.

"Yas, et am strange, but den Chloe, she hab huh han's full now, an' dah am no tellin' w'en dat crittah git t' come t' see de ol' Missus. Ma'se Raymon' come f'om de Norf yestahday, an' we's got t' look 'bout fo' awhile."

"Raymond! Raymond!" murmured Mrs. Davidson; "who is Mr. Raymond, Joe? I do not recall the name as belonging to any one around here; he must be a new-comer!"

"Missus, dat am de gem'n who am de ownah ob de ol' plantation," answered Joe, while confusion almost betrayed him into making a fatal error, and one which he had been repeatedly warned against.

"Oh, yes, I do remember now, that the old place has been sold. I presume there are a great many changes and that it is quite different from what it used to be?"

"Yas'm; dah am a great many t'ings gwine on out in de valley et de presen' time, but de wo'k am mos' done now, an' all de han's am gwine 'way t' some uddah place. Chloe am de cook, an' some mo' nig-gahs do diff'nt t'ings, en dey'll be all dat am dah perm'nantly. But Missus, de ol' place am not wha' et ustah be."

"No, Joe, I should imagine not," said the lady, as a far-away look rested upon her sweet sad face.

"Dah am some places dat'll 'main jes' es dey wah

in de yeahs pas', do," said Joe, with a curious intonation, which was not lost upon either of the ladies.

They conversed for some time, when old Joe took his leave. While in the village, he had learned that little Hal had been carried away by Bart Nelson, and that a posse of men were on his trail.

CHAPTER XV

WHEN Brainard dismissed the driver that had brought him from the Garrison, and his team went rumbling away over the winding road, he allowed himself to be conducted over the plantation by Joe. Then they entered the house and passed from room to room, until they had examined the structure from garret to cellar. Leading the way to the luxuriously fitted library, Joe opened the door with much ceremony and bowed respectfully. Brainard walked slowly in, and looking about, lifted his eyes to a picture which had been placed with its face to the wall. He then waved Joe out of the room, and stood silent and preoccupied by the side of the library table.

"At last, at last! I am near her, but ah, the vacuum; the horrible aching void in my soul! As I look into the dreary past, nothing but the ashes of blasted hopes; as I gaze into the future, nothing but a barren waste!"

"Years have passed! Time has silvered my hair and deep lines have furrowed my face. I am changed; not one of my friends of the long ago would recognize me. Yet, somehow, hope bids me be patient; down

in my soul, something urges me not to despair; but the suspense is horrible!"

Touching a bell, he summoned Joe and requested that he send Chloe to the library.

"Yas, sah," answered the old darkey, as he hurriedly left the room, returning almost immediately, followed by his wife, whose face beamed with pleasure.

"Aunt Chloe, I have summoned you that you and your husband may listen to a few words from me. Yesterday, as you know, I arrived at Muscogee, and secured passage to the river on the daily stage. Time has worked wonders. From the driver I learned of the many changes which have taken place during the years that I have been a wanderer. Most of my old friends are sleeping upon the hillside beneath the elms. Perhaps there are some who would recall the name of Jack Brainard; but to the majority I have never existed. Now to my friends Jack Brainard is no more: Henceforth, I am Phillip Raymond. You are to bury the name of Brainard, and never again call me by my former appellation. Joe has known of my wishes in this matter for some time. In the past, you were among my kindest friends; therefore, go to your work, and under this new name which you must not forget, I will begin life anew."

With this admonition to his faithful servants, Phillip Raymond, as he will henceforth be called, waved them out of his presence, and turned to the window

which afforded the most extensive view of the valley.

Evening was fast drawing to its close, when Joe was again summoned to the library, where he found Raymond pacing excitedly up and down the room. He had determined to seek Talbot's band and assist in recovering the child of Constance McDowell.

"Joe?" he said hurriedly, "have the horses at the gate at eight o'clock sharp, saddled and equipped for a trip to the hills."

"Yas, sah," answered Joe, as he moved out of the room muttering: "Ma'se Ja——Phillip mus' be gwine t' ride then," and with a doleful shake of his head, he continued in an undertone, "dah am cu'yus t'ings in de aih. Las' night, Chloe read de groun's in de cup, an' a fox ba'k out dah in de woods; an' dis mahn'n', a rabbit run 'cross my paf', es I wah gwine down de lane, an' dem am all signs ob ebil. May de good Lawd 'tec' us f'om ha'm."

Reaching the apartment of Chloe, he said: "Ma'se Phillip say fo' me t' hab de hosses ready fo' de road at eight sha'p," then lowering his voice to a whisper, he added, "honey, chile, dah am 'sterious t'ings gwine t' take place in de hills befo' de sun rise in de mahn'n'. De face ob Ma'se Phillip am stern, an' dah am a look 'bout 'is eye dat am awful! awful! Chloe."

"Go 'long, Joey; hab yo' fo'git dat de chile ob Missus Constance hab be'n 'ducted, an' carried t' de hills by dat debbil Bart Nelson? Ain't yo' tol' me

dis yere berry ebenen', Joe, dat Ma'se Phillip lubs ouah li'l' gearl yit, an' hab sorrah on 'count ob de chile?"

"Yo' am right, Chloe; an' yoah Joe nebbah may 'tuhn f'om de hills ob de Rattlesnake, fo' he'll ride 'hin' Ma'se Phillip t' night."

The evening meal being over, Joe went to the stables, and soon two of the fleetest horses were at the gate. When twilight deepened, Phillip came slowly out of the house and after examining his mount very carefully, sprang into the saddle and turned his steed to the northeast. Old Chloe watched them as they made the bend in the road and their forms faded into the evening shadows.

The foliage was very dense, and after having gone a mile or so, Raymond reined his animal to the right and plunged into the tangled mass with the boldness of a veteran woodsman. Joe followed in the rear, bending low to escape the trailing grape vines that festooned the trees. Thus they pushed on for miles, neither speaking a word.

Raymond knew well the lay of the land, and also knew that by making short cuts across the ravines and around the points of the hills, he would be able to reach the ford on the Black Bird by which Heck Talbot and his little band would be most likely to cross. Thus shaping his course, and keeping away from the beaten trails that ran diagonally across the country, they pushed silently on.

For hours and hours they rode through the gloom, leaping over fallen trunks, splashing through glades, skirting towering ledges, and rounding huge boulders, while from the darkest points of the wood, the mournful cry of the night-bird could be heard.

Suddenly, Raymond drew rein; dismounting, he handed his bridle to Joe and proceeded to examine the faintly discernible trail with a critical eye.

"This is the crossing of the Black Bird, Joe. Talbot and his men have not reached here yet, so dismount and let your horse rest, as we will wait for them at this point."

"All right, Ma'se," whispered Joe, as he sprang out of the saddle and led both animals out of the trail. Then he tethered them to a sapling and returned to the place where Raymond was examining the ground.

Although Talbot had some hours the start, Raymond knew enough of the country to feel assured that he had not reached this point, and wishing to join him, decided to await his arrival. They remained here but a short time, when the thud of horses' feet was heard coming up the valley to the right. Crouching in the shadows, both Raymond and Joe held their guns ready for instant use, and waited for the riders to come sufficiently near to be identified.

Joe was well acquainted with Talbot and most of the men he had with him when he left the Garrison;

so there was little danger of their being surprised. Nearer came the tramp of horses, and in a few moments the dim outlines of horsemen could be discerned as they rode silently in the wake of their leader. When they reached a position in front of Raymond and Joe, the foremost one stopped and waited for the others to come up, as they were going to ford the stream and it was best for all to be together.

"By ——! this is the very ford we have been looking for all this time," said Talbot, "and now we are in a fair way to make time."

When Raymond was assured that these men were indeed the friends of Mrs. McDowell, he stepped from behind a tree and made himself known. Joe followed, and they shortly arranged for the two forces to join and continue their journey with the same object in view. Raymond, though he was unknown to any of the party, even to Talbot, found no difficulty in setting matters straight, as all knew Joe, and also knew that he was true to his friends, especially the family of his old master.

In a few moments they were on the trail once more, the Indian leading the way as he moved noiselessly through the trees. When the first streaks of dawn colored the East, a halt was called. Soon all the horses were relieved of their accouterments, and browsed contentedly upon the soft luscious grass.

which carpeted the little vale that had been selected as a camping-place for the day.

When all the animals had received attention, a council of ways and means was assembled, and after some time spent in deliberating as to the best method of searching the surrounding country, it was decided to send a runner in every direction and await their return until nightfall before moving. Accordingly, Talbot called two men from their blankets and told them what had been determined. The men said not a word, but nodded their heads in acquiescence, and after eating a hastily prepared breakfast they soon disappeared, leaving the little camp in silence. One of the runners who had been chosen, was the same who had trailed the outlaw from the start, and whose eyes sparkled with pride, as he pointed to a fresh indentation. Boldly he passed into the tangled forest and followed the winding course of the Black Bird, while those in the camp were patiently awaiting the coming of night.

Raymond was restless and ill at ease from this enforced inactivity, yet there was nothing for him to do but simply wait. The others talked in low tones, speculating as to the reason Nelson could have in abducting Hal McDowell. Here, Raymond's eager ears did not lose a word of the conversation, and his heart was bitter when he realized that she, of whom they spoke in such tender tones, was the one most dear to him.

One of the oldest in the company was quite loquacious, and was encouraged by Phillip Raymond to relate all he knew of the inhabitants of the Garrison; by which device, he was made acquainted with much which had transpired during the years of his absence. Thus the day was passed, and as the shadows began to settle upon the valley all knew that something of a startling nature would likely transpire.

True to Talbot's expectation, when the sun was sinking to rest behind the western hills, a noise was heard in the direction taken by the runners, and the lithe young Cherokee stepped into the open. All was expectancy; the stern-faced men crowded eagerly around to hear what the scout had to tell, and they breathed heavily as he related his story of having tracked Nelson to his lair and of having remained in close proximity to the place for some time. He had seen little Hal playing about the mouth of the cavern, and had even crept close enough to learn that there was some dissension among the men.

"Boys," said Talbot, "the time has come when we must reach the end of our journey. Saddle the horses, and do it quietly, for death lurks in the very air where that devil Nelson is concerned."

Joe looked after the mounts of Raymond and himself, and was ready to fall into line with the rest. When all was completed, Talbot gave the signal and the cavalcade moved silently out of the hidden alcove,

following in the wake of the runner who had succeeded in reaching the camp of the outlaws.

All was quiet; not a carbine made a sound, as they filed slowly through the shadows. Every man had examined his arms and replaced the old shells with new ones. After they had traveled a number of miles, the runner halted; faint shouts could be heard, and boisterous songs came floating upon the air. The followers of Talbot breathed deeply; every nerve was at its highest tension as the command was given to advance. Guns were raised, while fingers sought the triggers; reins were tightened, and with a yell, the little band swooped down upon the rollicking crowd that had left the cave and were amusing themselves in the open.

At the first intimation of danger, Nelson leaped to his feet and shouted to his men that they were betrayed. The outlaws could not realize that they were attacked, and were consequently slow in making a defense.

On came that resistless band, and as they entered the arena, a crash of arms awakened the echoes. Bang! bang! and the flashes lighted up the weird scene with a vividness never to be forgotten. In vain did the leader of the outlaws try to steady his men. Bitter curses fell from his lips as he saw them succumb and flee to the hills, while others lay upon the ground moaning as their life-blood ebbed away. Seeing his men retreat, Nelson determined

to make an effort to reach the cave and carry off the boy.

Crash! boom! went the guns of the combatants with renewed destructiveness, as he sprang across the line of fire and made his way to what seemed to be a mass of foliage. All was turmoil as the bullets whistled and were flattened against the boulders or went crashing through the limbs of the trees, causing the rocky defiles to echo and re-echo.

Phillip Raymond singled out the tall form of Nelson in the dim light, and seeing him retreat in direction of the cavern, and mentally divining his purpose, said: "Shoot low, men," then leaping from his saddle, rushed through the glade in time to intercept him.

"Surrender! damn you!" he hissed to the desperado.

"Never!" shouted the other, as he wheeled and grappled with Raymond who was upon him.

Phillip felt the long sinuous fingers close about his throat as he struck blindly in the dark. A pair of devilish eyes gleamed before his face, as a voice hissed in his ears: "Jack Brainard, curse ye! I know ye, and by the power of Satan, your time has come. Vengeance is mine at last; ha, ha!"

Great beads of perspiration rolled down Raymond's face, as he realized there was no mercy in the tones of Nelson, then with a superhuman effort he broke

the hold of the other, and grasping his long hunting-knife, plunged the glittering blade into the side of his antagonist. With a yell of pain Nelson staggered and clasped his hand over the wound. For a moment he was dazed, then with the strength born of despair, leaped once more upon Raymond. Curses came from his clinched teeth, and brutal blows resounded as the two reeled from side to side, each struggling for the mastery. Nelson found that he was no match for his antagonist, and uttering one long shrill whistle sprang away through the dense undergrowth. It was the signal for retreat, and with one parting yell, the band followed their leader into the forest.

"Boys," cried Heck Talbot; "ther innimy's gone, an' we didn't git ther leader. Strike a light an' le's' see what ther damage is, an' in ther mornin' we'll take ther trail agin."

One of the men gathered some dry sticks and twigs, and with a match soon succeeded in starting a ruddy blaze which made possible an inspection. Old Joe was by the side of Raymond, trying to stop the flow of blood from a deep knife wound.

"By thunder!" exclaimed Talbot; "this makes me think of the racket we had some time back with ther gang down on the little Wewoka, when ther Creek Kid was ranging through the Seminole Hills stealin' all the cattle and peddlin' 'nuff booze ter swim a prairie schooner, b'gosh! 'cept these fellers

hev got a better leader'n that gang hed. One thing shore, though, we'll git ter ther trail ter-night an' in the mornin' take et unct more an' either run 'em out'n ther hills or capter 'em."

CHAPTER XVI

WHILE Talbot was looking over the ground, Raymond was waiting in an agony of suspense. He knew that Nelson had not succeeded in carrying off the boy, consequently was assured that the child was somewhere in close proximity or Nelson would not have struggled so desperately.

"Joe," he said, "we must find the boy. It will never do to go back to that mother without him, and while the others are busy with the wounded, we will search the cavern; come!"

Raymond drew aside the swaying mass of foliage, and entered the gloomy recess. Looking carefully about him, he advanced into the unknown depths with nerves strained to their highest tension. Joe kept close behind him with his knife grasped in readiness, should some miscreant be lying in wait for them. Step by step they advanced, placing their feet cautiously upon the ground while endeavoring to be as quiet as possible, thereby lessening their chances of becoming the mark for some concealed foe.

Raymond's eyes burned with anguish. In these few hours he again lived over the past and knew too

well that he had drunk the cup of selfish worldly pleasure at the expense of true happiness. Once more he saw the woman he loved as she sat by his side listening to the tremulous words of the white-haired minister.

Heavens! how grand she looked on that morning when she said "Go, go! You are unworthy of my love!" And he had gone—gone out of her life and his own paradise to become a wanderer upon the face of the earth. A feeling of bitter endurance filled his soul. No longer was he the thoughtless youth, who could inflict sorrow without a pang, for he had believed that it was altogether his own recklessness which had raised the barrier between him and the love of his youth. Now he was utterly changed from the pleasure-loving boy into a man who viewed life seriously. Fortune had dealt generously with him, and he had built his home on the banks of the Fourteen Mile as a monument to the spot where he first learned the true worth of a noble woman's love, and where he had writhed under the scorn of a woman's anger.

"Now, now!" he muttered under his breath, as he went groping along through the gloomy arched cavern, "God grant that I may be able to carry her son safe from the clutches of that devil."

Traversing the corridor for some distance, the sound of running water reached his ears and he stopped to listen.

Just then his foot struck against something in the pathway, and stooping, he placed his hand upon a human form. Some one who had been wounded in the contest had doubtless crept here to die, he thought, then moving his hands about in the darkness, he discovered that the form was that of a child, and calling to Joe in a husky voice, said:

"Joe, I have found Hal; but Oh, I fear he is either dead or badly wounded." He was so overcome by the thought, that it was several moments ere he could summon courage to carry the little one to the light lest his worse fears should be confirmed.

Finding a match he struck it, and by the flickering blaze looked at the pure young face, white in its unconsciousness.

"My God!" cried Raymond, "it cannot be that he is dead! Get some water quick and we may save him yet! We must save him," he said in a choking voice.

Old Joe needed no second bidding, but hastened out of the cave's leafy entrance followed by Raymond who bore the boy tenderly in his arms. He laid him down upon a bed of leaves and hastily unfastened the little coat. Placing his hand upon the heart of the child, he breathed one silent prayer, for the faint pulsation assured him that life was not extinct. He applied a flask of brandy to the white lips and was rewarded by seeing a faint flush come into the face, while the midnight eyes slowly opened. Oh, the joy

that filled the soul of the strong man as he realized that her child lived and that he would not be the har-binger of sad tidings to the Elms.

At this juncture, old Joe came with the water.

"Heah, Ma'se Phillip," then kneeling down by the boy, clasped one of the little hands in his, and continued: "Oh, doan tol' me dat de bressed chile am dead; doan tol' de ol' niggah dat he mus' go t' de Elms, an' say t' de li'l' Missus dat huh chile am gone fo' ebbah." The distress of the old man aroused Phillip, who was sitting as if benumbed.

"Hush, Joe! The boy is not dead, he is only hurt. Help me to find his injuries," and Hal as if understanding, raised his little hand to his head. In an instant Joe secured a light from the fire, and they discovered an ugly gash where he had struck his head against a sharp stone in falling. A critical examination convinced Raymond that while the wound was not in itself dangerous, if not properly attended to at once, might cause serious complications.

"Joe, mount the best horse here and ride like the wind to the Elms. Tell Mrs. McDowell that her son has received a slight wound, and then go to Dr. Armstead and have him go at once to the Plantation where I will meet him as soon as possible with the boy. Tell the ladies that Phillip Raymond desires them to come with you, and that his home is at their disposal. Aunt Chloe will have everything in readiness for their convenience. Go above the ford of the Black Bird

and you will cut off five miles. Ride like the very devil was after you, for this wound must be attended to before inflammation ensues. I will follow as soon as possible."

When Raymond saw that his directions were obeyed, and Joe was pushing rapidly in the direction of the Garrison, he carried the wounded child down the hill to the camp.

"Here Talbot," he said to the leader of the rescuers, "we have found the boy, and he is pretty badly hurt. I have sent Joe for a physician, and I will carry Hal to my home on the Fourteen Mile. When you and your men have done your best to exterminate those devils, come to my place; you will be welcome and well cared for as long as you desire to stay. I must go at once, for it is a long ride and I shall not be able to travel very rapidly on account of the child's critical condition, which may become more so, as he is quite feverish already." All this had been spoken in short quick tones which betokened intense, though suppressed excitement. After he had gone, Talbot muttered under his breath:

"Raymond knows a blamed sight more of little Hal than he would have us guess."

CHAPTER XVII

As soon as practicable after Talbot's departure from the Elms, couriers had been sent back at intervals with such information as would tend to encourage the inmates to hope for the best. Aunt Chloe had sent one of the servants from the Plantation, to tell the ladies that Ma'se Raymond and Joe had gone away in the night to join the men in their search for little Hal.

Constance and her mother could but wonder that an utter stranger should aid in a matter which could have no interest for him save that of an ordinary fellow-feeling for those in distress, yet it seemed that courtesy and even duty would have prompted him only to send some of his servants. "However," said Mrs. Davidson, "it is very good of him, and we must show our appreciation as soon as an opportunity is afforded."

She little knew how soon this would be. All day the men were riding from the hills with reports of what had transpired. It was told that Talbot and his men were on Nelson's trail, and the leader swore that he would never return until the boy was found.

This cheered the ladies more than anything else, for they knew the tenacity of Talbot when he was aroused, and besides, he was an old friend of their family and would lay down his life for them if necessary.

The night wore on. Mrs. McDowell had gone to her room and lay in fitful slumber on her couch. She awoke to hear the clock on the mantel strike three, and with one fervent prayer to her Heavenly Father, sank to sleep and dreamed vivid dreams. Once more she was a light-hearted girl on the banks of the Fourteen Mile. The birds sang, and the flowers bloomed just the same, until the fatal day when her love was stabbed and her idol lay in ruins at her feet. The scene changed; she was no longer a confiding girl, but a woman into whose soul the iron had entered, and she sent him out of her life forever.

In her dreams, she lived over the past with all its joys, all its heartaches, all its withered hopes. How long she slept she never knew, but was aroused by some one laying a hand upon her head, and whispering:

"Connie, I hear the sound of horses' feet; perhaps some one is coming with news of our boy."

Instantly she was wide awake, and heard distinctly the pounding of hoofs on the road. A wan smile came to her lips; the excitement of the last thirty-six hours was beginning to tell upon her.

"Missus, Missus!" called Eliza, "it am Joe-

a-comin' ; it am Joe Waitie fo' suah ; he am come f'om de hills wid some kindah news."

Both ladies tried to summon courage to answer the call of Eliza, but their trouble made them afraid to hear anything, lest it might be bad. In a moment Joe was at the door, and Eliza said to him :

"De news, Joe, de news ; wha' am de news ob de chile?"

"Go sen' de Missus heah, 'Liza ; 'caze I mus' tol' huh de tidin's."

At that instant, Mrs. Davidson stepped into the doorway, and Joe ignoring the peremptory question of Eliza, turned to his Mistress saying :

"Missus, we hab foun' de boy. Ma'se Phillip tol' me t' ride like de win' an' come t' de Elms de fus place, den go fo' de doctah, an' hab 'im an' yo' an' Missus Constance come t' de Fo'teen Mile es fas' es ebbah yo' c'n. We hab had a fight wid de debbils an' yoah li'l' gran'son wah hu't on de haid ; Ma'se Phillip say et wah not bad yit, but dat de doctah mus' come at onct wid yo'. Ma'se Phillip am a-comin' down de uddah road wid Ma'se Hal, an' 'spec' t' meet us at home. Jes' hab de car'age ready, an' ol' Joe'll be bac' wid de doctah soon's he c'n git 'im."

"My boy, my boy!" cried Mrs. McDowell as she stood rooted to the spot. "Oh, my God!" she cried incoherently, as she slowly divined the purport of the message brought by old Joe.

The carriage was ordered, and they were soon

speeding on their way to the Plantation, leaving Joe and the doctor to follow on horseback, which they did, overtaking the ladies as they were entering the woods.

"Joe," said Mrs. Davidson, "you may cross the hill and inform Aunt Chloe that we are coming, that she may not be put to any inconvenience."

"Yas'm! Yo' jes' dribe down by wha' de lil' church ustah be, an' I'll go obah de hill," replied Joe, as he urged his horse to greater speed.

Consequently, when the carriage came in view of Raymond's house, Aunt Chloe was bustling about with as much energy as she could summon; and as the vehicle drew up, she was at the door to welcome the occupants.

"Come right in, yo' deah frien's, come right in an' mak' yoahselbes at home, while ol' Chloe 'pare yo' some tea, fo' de mahn'n' am cool, an' et'll do yo' good."

"Thank you, Chloe," said Mrs. Davidson, as she allowed the old darkey to remove her wraps. Then turning to Constance, Chloe said reassuringly:

"Doan yo' worry, li'l' Missus; Ma'se Phillip'll soon be heah, an' yoah boy'll be safe in yoah ahms, safe an' soun'." Then stroking her hair, Chloe continued: "Yo' doan kno' how glad Chloe am t' see yo' on de Plantation onct mo'; et am jes' like de time w'en all ob us wah heah, an' w'en no trubbles come t' worry obah, but et am lonely now out heah."

The sun had arisen above the hill-tops and was bathing the valley with floods of glory. As Mrs. Davidson viewed the surrounding country, her daughter looked longingly at the bend in the road where she hoped to see Phillip Raymond approaching.

Though all was changed as if by magic, she had no thought for aught save her child, and many were the prayers she sent up in behalf of the lone rider who was hastening to his home on the Fourteen Mile. Soon there came floating to her ears the sound of hoofs. Far down the road there was a cloud of dust through which she could discern the outlines of a horseman.

"God be thanked!" she murmured, as she sank upon the floor by the window where she remained for a time, only raising her eyes when she heard the gate swing open to admit the rescuer of her child.

It was Raymond, holding in his arms little Hal whose golden head rested confidently against his shoulder. The childish face was pinched and wan.

During that long wearisome ride, the heart of Phillip Raymond turned to her boy, and in his moments of mad joy the bearded lips touched the damp ringlets of Constance's child.

"Her son—yes, hers!" he murmured, "and how like my love, my love! On Prince, on!" he cried, as he stroked the slender neck of his horse that seemed to understand as he sped steadily onward. Now they skimmed over some grassy glade, then

threaded their way across rough gulches and rocky ravines; now they skirted the boulder-strewn crest of a hill, yet ever on and on, leaving miles behind.

It was a ride for life—the life of her boy, and Raymond's lips grew stern as memory reverted to the events which had led up to this hour.

The sun had risen, and its rays were filtered through the branches just as he entered the valley of the Fourteen Mile, then checking the speed of his noble animal, he rode slowly for some distance.

The gentle swaying motion had lulled the little sufferer into a fitful slumber, and at intervals the word "Mamma, mamma," was repeated. Then Raymond would again urge his steed onward. At last he came to the bend in the road leading up to his home, and giving rein to his horse, reached the gate. Old Joe was there; by his side stood the doctor and Mrs. Davidson, while Chloe remained with her young Mistress. As the sudden shock of seeing her boy would have been too much for her in her overwrought nervous condition, she had been persuaded to wait in the house, a fact for which Raymond was very thankful; while his heart yearned for her, he feared she might penetrate his disguise, which would be embarrassing for them both under the circumstances, as it might be necessary for her to remain at the Plantation indefinitely.

"My child! my child!" cried Mrs. Davidson, as Joe lifted the boy from the arms of Raymond.

The doctor then presented her to Phillip Raymond, and she said: "May God bless you, sir, for your kindness to us in our sore trial," while her tears fell on the hand she clasped.

"Mrs. Davidson, it was only my duty as well as my pleasure, and anything that I may be able to do for you and yours, will be my joy; I gladly await your commands," said Raymond, as he bowed low over the white hand which still clasped his.

Meanwhile, Joe had carried Hal into the house, and the doctor began his examination with a grave face. Finally, he said:

"Thanks to the prompt action of Mr. Raymond, Hal is not in any immediate danger, and there is no cause for alarm, but he must be kept quiet, perfectly quiet, that no complications may arise."

"Thank God!" murmured Mrs. Davidson, while old Chloe, unable to repress her feelings of joy, rushed to inform Constance of what the doctor had said. For a moment, her tortured senses refused to grasp the import of the words, but when she was able to realize the truth, tears of joy flowed from her eyes.

"Saved! saved! Thank God! I must see Mr. Raymond; I must thank him for all he has done for me and my child!" With this, she laid her head upon the shoulder of her humble friend and sobbed, old Chloe stroking her hair, and murmuring gently.

"Yas, 'deed, honey, Ma'se Phillip am bery kin'."

CHAPTER XVIII

PHILLIP RAYMOND was in his own apartments where he had gone to change his apparel, and now was standing in front of a lifesize painting upon which he gazed with adoring eyes. It was the picture of Constance McDowell taken long years before when the bloom of youth was upon her oval face. All those years seemed to sweep before him, and again he lived in the days when the song of peace thrilled every fiber of his being, and now an inexplicable feeling of hope sprang up in his heart and a smile hovered about the corners of his mouth as he put up his hand and touched the ruby lips in the painting with a tenderness almost womanly. The smile lingered but a moment when it vanished, and the lines of his face deepened again as he recalled the fact that an insurmountable barrier lay between his love and himself—an abyss which death alone could bridge.

“Ma’sse Phillip! Ma’sse Phillip!” called Joe, “May I come in, sah?”

Before answering, Raymond gently drew the cov-

ering over the pictured face, then said, "All right, Joe; what is it?"

"De doctah am waitin' fo' yo' in de parlor, sah; an' he say dat de li'l' boy'll git well, but dat he mus' stay still, an' not be moved 'bout, sah. He am sleepin' now, an' de ladies an' de doctah am 'sembled fo' de pu'pos ob 'stendin' yo' fo'mal t'anks fo' wha' yo' hab done."

At this information, Raymond's brain reeled, a quiver of excitement rushed over him. "Heavens," he thought, "I am to meet her face to face; I am to listen to the sound of her voice which has ever rung in my ears," then summoning all his self-control, replied:

"Please inform the ladies and the doctor that I will be with them in a few moments." With this, he sent Joe away, and entering his dressing-room, soon came out prepared to meet the ordeal which awaited him without betraying himself in any way. While he had little fear of being recognized, he did not desire to arouse the suspicions of the doctor who would be more apt to notice anything out of the usual order than the ladies, on account of their absorption in the welfare of the child.

Adjusting his glasses as a precaution, he descended the stairway and entered the parlor where he was met by the physician.

"While we have had no formal introduction, I presume I am addressing Mr. Raymond?"

"That is my name, sir," replied Phillip.

"I am Dr. Armstead," and then presented Mrs. McDowell whom he had not seen upon his arrival.

Advancing, she extended her hand, and said :

"Mr. Raymond, may God's choicest blessings be showered upon you; I thank you from the depths of my heart for what you have done for my child. But for you, he would have died there alone in the darkness."

Phillip's face paled as he grasped the extended hand and held it closely clasped in his own.

"Mrs. McDowell it will be the greatest joy of my life to render you any service, and that which I have done is not worth mentioning; the pleasure was all mine, and will be intensified by the complete recovery of your little boy," with a slight emphasis on the pronoun.

Mrs. McDowell resumed her seat, and Phillip addressing both, said :

"My dwelling and all I have is at your disposal; and I shall be your debtor, if you will consent to remain indefinitely under my roof. I only hope that the time may not hang heavily, nor in any respect be irksome. Fortunately, I have a fine collection of books which may interest you."

"Thank you for your generous offer, which we gratefully accept," said Mrs. Davidson, speaking for herself and daughter.

That evening, while the gentlemen were seated on the veranda of the Plantation Home looking out over the lovely valley, and smoking their cigars, Raymond recounted all that had transpired from the time he had joined in the pursuit of Nelson, and the bitterness of his tone when he mentioned the name of the leader of the outlaws, caused the doctor to look at him with a puzzled expression, then remembering what had seemed to him a husky indistinct sound in his voice when in the presence of Mrs. McDowell, which then he had ascribed to weariness, together with the settled abstractedness of his manner, aroused the doctor's suspicions, and he felt assured that there was some mystery connected with it all, which even the calm exterior of Raymond could not wholly cover. Yet a sense of propriety restrained him from any comment.

Chloe was lighting up the rooms, and Mrs. Davidson and Constance were by the bedside of little Hal watching for the slightest change. After his diagnosis of the case, the doctor said there was much fever which, owing to the nervous temperament of the child, might increase, causing other complications if the patient were not carefully guarded and nursed.

After a time the gentlemen entered the parlor, the doctor to see if there were any change in the sufferer's condition, and Raymond to manifest his courtesy and interest in his guests.

Constance McDowell sat in the mellow rays of the

lamp in full view of Phillip. His eyes drank in every detail of the classic face and every curve of the moulded form. That she, too, had suffered, he knew from the tinge of weariness in her movements and the look in her eyes. Turning her head suddenly, she met the eyes of Phillip Raymond regarding her intently; and while only for an instant, she felt a strange foreboding—a haunting sense of something indefinable, mysterious, for which she could not account, and trembled, despite her efforts to appear at ease.

Raymond, perceiving that his espionage was noticed, walked out on the veranda, and calling Joe, said:

“I received a message by telegram to-day stating that my ward and some lady friends are on their way here, having left the city four or five days earlier than they anticipated, hence they will reach the Garrison on the morning train; so see that you have the carriage at the depot when they arrive, and also a wagon for their baggage.”

“Yas, sah, Ma’sse Phillip,” replied old Joe, mystified as to what he meant.

A moment later, Raymond was again in the presence of his guests, and while glancing at the telegram in his hand, remarked:

“I am glad to be able to inform you that my ward and some friends will reach the Garrison on the early morning train;” with this, he read the message aloud:

DENVER.

MR. PHILLIP RAYMOND:

Your ward coming with a party on No. 56. Will arrive Wednesday.

WARREN.

Then turning to Chloe, who sat in an obscure corner, that she might not be too far from the "chile", said:

"Chloe, my attorney has wired me that Miss Moses and friends will arrive on Wednesday, to-morrow; so you will see that their rooms are in readiness for them," then again speaking to his guests:

"I have never become very well acquainted with Miss Moses, though for years I have been her guardian. I have been traveling most of the time and she has been in school, still from what I know of her, she is a sensible young lady, although at times wilful and full of pranks. I dare say she will bring mirth with her, and that she will keep Chloe busy scolding her and trying to keep her out of mischief."

Having thus paved the way for a pleasant acquaintance of his visitors with his young ward, Raymond bowed himself out of the room to seek his own apartments.

CHAPTER XIX

MORNING found Joe on his way to the station, which he reached fifteen minutes before the east-bound train arrived. There were very few loungers about the depot at this early hour, and Joe marched up and down the platform with a sense of his own importance.

As the train slowed up at the station, he was all eyes in his impatience to see Ma'se Phillip's friends. Soon a bevy of girls crowded the steps in a hurried effort to leave the train. Such a conglomeration of boxes, bundles, portmanteaus, and bird-cages, Joe had never seen; and glancing down the train, he saw trunk after trunk deposited upon the platform. All this he surveyed, as he scratched his woolly pate, trying to devise some means whereby he could convey the baggage out to the plantation without the aid of a third team. At last all were safely aground, and with a gracious smile, Kellogg the conductor waved his hand to the grinning face protruding from the cab window, and the train slowly steamed away.

Espying old Joe, one of the ladies, who proved to be Miss Moses, approached him, saying, "Can you

direct us where we can secure a conveyance to Mr. Phillip Raymond's plantation?"

"'Deed I c'n, Miss; I am come to fotch yo' dah," replied Joe as he doffed his hat.

"Oh, girls, guardie received the telegram, and has sent for us," cried Miss Moses in ecstasy.

"Right dis way, ladies," said Joe, leading them in the direction of the waiting conveyance.

"Good gracious, Della," cried the young lady, "won't it be jolly? And girls, all, did you ever see such a funny-looking little creature as he?" nodding to Joe.

Then calling him, she began to pile his arms full of hat boxes and various other articles essential to her comfort. Up, up, higher yet, the bundles were piled, until old Joe was quite concealed and almost smothered.

"Now, Mr. man, we are ready." Joe groaned.

"'Clare t' goodness I kain't see nuffin' a' tall," and his eyes rolled uneasily, as he endeavored to peer over his barricade.

Meanwhile, the girls stood looking on with silent laughter at Miss Moses who, having stacked box upon box, waited for Joe to lead the way. Beads of perspiration began to roll down his black face, as he stepped gingerly in the direction of where he believed the carriage to be, but he reasoned wrong; as his vision was obscured by his load, he could not see the truck which obstructed his path, consequently

stumbled over it, scattering the boxes and bird-cages on all sides, as he sputtered around trying vainly to retain his equilibrium.

"Gracious, girls, look at him," cried the saucy minx, as she stopped and caught up a cage containing a canary. "I do believe he has killed my poor bird. Why, you awkward man; how could you?"

"I begs yoah pahdon, Missus; I cert'ny does," replied Joe, "but et wah mo'n I c'd tote, an' den I didn't see dat doggone' t'ing dah 'tall."

"Your carelessness is quite beyond my comprehensibility," said Mantie with mock severity, as she turned her head to hide a mischievous twinkle.

"Et am pas' yoah w'at?" asked Joe, who could not take in a word composed of so many syllables.

"My comprehensibility."

"May de good Lawd fo'gib yo' fo' callin' dis niggah names, 'case he fell obah de truck," said Joe with his native solemnity.

"Gracious me, girls, did you ever hear anything so nonsensical?" then again turning to Joe, she continued:

"I have always been accustomed to having servants retain their physical equilibrium in my presence, sir."

"E-ki-lib-um," muttered Joe, looking about in alarm. "Wha' am et? Golly, I wishes Ma'se Philip'd sen' some'n else out heah. Ekilibum—nebbah heah ob dat befo'—guess et am in some ob dem boxes; 'clar t' goodness, et am strange."

"What is your name?" queried Miss Moses.

"Josephus Washington Waitie, Missus; leastwise, dat am w'at I goes by," answered Joe.

"And does not that cognomen weary you?" she asked.

At this Joe almost collapsed, and glared wildly about, as if he would desert this new acquaintance.

"De good Lawd hab mussy," he groaned, "dat dah gearl am de berry wus pusson dat I ebah see, an' all dem wo'ds hab flusticated my haid."

All this time, Mantie's friends stood by witnessing the fun, and at last gathering up numerous bundles, held them, while they shook with laughter. Finally everything was in the carriage, and old Joe stood helplessly at the head of the team, muttering and revolving in his mind how he was going to convey that noisy group to the Plantation without accident.

When they had filled the front seat full of luggage and crowded themselves in the rear one, Mantie said to Joe:

"Now, you can place the rest of the things on top."

"Dah am de wagon heah to tote de t'ings, Missus."

"Oh, well, then, we are ready."

Joe mounted his seat and started towards home. They had proceeded but a mile, when Mantie, with a wink at Della Barnett, said to Joe:

"How many quadrupeds does Mr. Raymond keep for the chase?"

"Golly, dah et am ag'in," groaned, Joe as he

turned around only to see the young lady looking demurely over the rolling prairie; so for a time, he did not attempt to answer her last question, then thinking she might be waiting, replied:

"Missus, dah am no sich t'ings es quat-ri-pids out dah; jes' de fox, an' de 'possum, an' de coon," with dignity, and a decided shake of his head; then settling into silence, drove on, while ruminating as to "w'at Ma'se Phillip'd do wid dat 'quisitive gearl."

As the carriage entered the timber, the young ladies could not repress exclamations of delight. The May-apple was in bloom; the laurel trees were laden with the essence of spring and the scene was one of enchantment. A mile farther and they entered the valley of the Fourteen Mile, and as they made a bend in the road, found themselves in open view of Phillip Raymond's home.

CHAPTER XX

As the gray streaks of dawn began to light the east with tapering fingers of transparency, a cavalcade of horsemen came sweeping down the valley and drew rein at the gate of the Plantation. It was Heck Talbot and his band of rough riders returning from the region of the Rattlesnake. They had given up the chase, and weary and travel-stained, they were quite delighted to accept the hearty invitation extended them by their new friend.

They had followed Nelson's trail across the rugged hills, and up the winding course of the Spavinaw, but there it was lost, and after spending hours in a fruitless effort to find it, Talbot had been forced to abandon the chase.

As the tired riders swung gracefully and easily from their saddles, old Heck's eyes surveyed the scene, but a mystified look crept into them.

"It's funny," he grunted. "Now what does a man like Raymond see in this old place? B'gosh, it's mor'n I kin see, w'en he has the whole world t' pick from!"

The noise of their approach awakened Raymond,

who called from his window: "That you, Talbot? Put your horses in the corral, and come in."

"All right, Cap'n. Come on boys," called Talbot to his men, as he led the way.

"Mighty hard life, this, ridin' all the time," said he to Phillip an hour later, as the boys lounged around in attitudes of abandon, while enjoying the aromatic odors wafted from the kitchen, where Chloe was bustling about in unprecedented haste.

"Gee whiz, boys! D'ye git a whiff o' that coffee, an' thet ham a-fryin' in thar?" said Dick Brunn to Milo Canfield, as he rolled a cigarette, and leaned back against the trunk of an old cedar.

"By gings, it's better'n sardines any time, an' I'm as hungry as a wolf, or a pet b'ar," said Bob Traylor from where he lay with his head resting in the seat of his saddle.

During this time, Talbot was telling Raymond about the chase after the outlaws, winding up by saying:

"It's d—— peculiar thet every time anything's been done, the critters head for the hills in above Zeke Proctor's and the Rabbit Trap. Say," he asked, as if suddenly remembering something, "how's ther kid gittin' on? Hurt much? No? Well, I'm right down proud of it. Darn my buttons, ef I didn't think he wuz about done fer when I see him layin' thar on the groun' so white and still, an' by —— when I saw that gash on his head, I swore a

mighty big oath agin thet devil Nelson. Oh, well, d— 'im, his time'll come, 't allers does t' ther likes of 'im."

"Yes," replied Raymond; "and God knows, this man has been running long enough."

"Come t' breakfas'," called Chloe, and instantly each one was on his feet. The first one to greet Talbot at the table, was Mrs. Davidson, who exclaimed, as the old ranger advanced:

"Mr. Talbot, permit me to thank you most earnestly for your kindness to me and mine," then extending her hand to each of the younger men, smiled and spoke kindly to them. She had lived long enough to appreciate the dangers which attended the lives of men who possessed their dare-devil spirit. When greetings had been exchanged, the host proceeded to dispense the savory viands with a lavish hand, to which ample justice was done and Chloe's culinary skill highly praised.

During the progress of the meal, Mrs. Davidson learned all that had befallen the band led by Talbot, and related the same to her daughter during the forenoon, adding in conclusion:

"At least we are secured from further molestation, as Nelson's gang will no doubt scatter now that their rendezvous has been discovered."

"I hope so," whispered Constance in a tone of fear, while a shudder shook her frame.

Presently the rumble of carriage wheels was heard.

Raymond was at the steps of the vehicle to welcome his guests and assist them to alight. A smile lighted his somber face, as Mantie Moses related the incident of the mishap to Joe, much to the latter's disgust, but to the delight of her fun-loving companions.

Old Heck, who was a listener, made a comment which aroused the little group who had spread their blankets under the swaying limbs of an oak for a good long rest. When their attention was called to the new arrivals, Heck said:

"All the gallants 'll be goin' a-fishin' in ther Fourteen Mile when they find out what a dainty piece of kaliker's to be foun' out here. By gum, I'll think about it myself."

"Go 'long, yo' old reprobate; who'd ye think'd be listenin' to yer song?" said Brunn, as he shifted around to obtain a better view of the newcomers, who were just entering the house.

"Thet one with black hair's the best-lookin' by a long jump," he added.

"Thunderation, man! whar did you take lessons in judgin' beauty? Et mus' hev been et a second-class school; shucks!" exclaimed Traylor in disgust.

"You go 'long!" returned Brunn; "guess I'm 'bout as good a judge es you be, an' a blamed sight better'n you, when et comes to the female portion of humanity." With this he rolled over, and pulling his slouch hat over his eyes, was soon snoring, unconscious of all that was going on about him.

Mantie introduced her young friends to Raymond, then delivered some letters sent by Warren. Chloe came to show them to their rooms. Each of the girls crept softly to the bedside of Hal and looked upon the little face, while speaking kindly and encouragingly to Constance, who sat gazing anxiously at her boy. For a moment Mantie hovered over the still form, then bending, pressed a kiss upon the pale cheek, and placing her arms about Constance, kissed her also. The simple act of the impulsive girl touched Constance, and laying her head on the girl's shoulder, she burst into tears. Mantie had been moved by the look of deep sorrow upon the face of her new acquaintance, and her girlish heart went out to her in love and sympathy. Years afterward, the moment was remembered by both as the beginning of a friendship which was destined to be faithful unto death. They learned to trust each other fully, and their acquaintance ripened into a strong and lasting love.

That evening, Talbot and his men rode away, carrying with them the remembrance of kind words, hearty thanks, and an invitation to return at any time. As they galloped over the road, Canfield cast his eyes backward and fancied he saw some one looking after them. Instantly the sombrero was lifted from his dark locks, and waved gracefully at the face. The flutter of a handkerchief held in a dainty white

hand was then seen and a satisfied smile illumed the face of the man.

Raymond had gone to a distant portion of the Plantation, only returning when the sun's rays fell obliquely across the vale. The doctor, considering Hal out of danger, had departed for his home, leaving instructions that he be summoned immediately, if necessary.

All day long Mantie had been skipping from place to place in her girlish glee; to the barnyard, down by the spring, over the meadows, in fact, nothing had escaped her attention, and now she sat demurely upon one of the banisters, clicking her small heels in a preoccupied manner, while her friends chatted noisily beneath an old elm, which spread its branches protectingly over the slightly rolling sward.

Mrs. Davidson was seated in a great arm-chair, while Constance stood by the library window, gazing absently at the approaching form of Phillip Raymond, who came cantering slowly up the driveway. It seemed as if there was something strangely familiar—something which she could not grasp, about this man. There seemed to be a striking resemblance between him and some one she had known, but who, who was it? Her heart thrilled strangely at the sound of his low, well-guarded voice, and its music rang in her ears long afterwards. Was it fancy, or did his hand really tremble for the brief moment hers rested in it? Was it absolutely true that he con-

trolled his tones with an effort when relating to them the incidents of his wild ride, or did she only conjecture all this? Yet, what was she to him that he should have risked so much to serve her? All these confusing thoughts coursed through her brain as she watched Raymond swing wearily from his saddle, throw the reins over a convenient post, and walk slowly towards the house. For the first time she had a good look at him. He was old; his hair was frosted; there were deep lines on his face; a pair of gold-rimmed glasses shaded his eyes.

At his approach Mantie sprang from her perch, brought an easy-chair from the drawing-room, placed it on the veranda, and was about to retire, when he spoke:

"Miss Moses, you are very kind. I feel assured we shall get on famously, and that you will soon learn to love this place as much as I." With this, the conversation drifted into commonplace channels. She had longed to see the Territory. She had read its legends, and pored over the thrilling stories in the magazines, which told of its stirring events. She was sure she would love the rolling prairies, the gray silent knolls, the whispering elms, and would become acquainted with the characteristics of those around her. Indeed, she was already deeply enamored with her environment, and had written to her friends in Denver, giving them a glowing description of her guardian's beautiful home.

All the guests assembled upon the wide veranda, and joined in the conversation. Constance had stolen away from the sick-room to obtain a few moments rest and enjoy the cool evening air. The girls were puzzled at the change in Mantie. A soberness seldom seen in her was visible in her sunny face, and while her laugh was unaltered, she seemed to be transformed.

The company lingered until the tree-tops on the distant hills reflected the golden light of the dying day. Mrs. Davidson arose from her chair and went to her room. Constance viewed the beautiful valley with an air of sadness. Mantie and her friends strolled down the driveway, forming a fair adjunct to the charming picture. Phillip Raymond was left alone with Constance McDowell for the first time in many years. He felt the magnetism of her presence, and trembled with suppressed excitement. Finally, in a voice which sounded strangely eager, he said:

"What a glorious sunset! Ah, Mrs. McDowell, how marvelous are the mysteries of nature!"

She was startled at the tones which had so baffled her, and which now brought her suddenly back from dreamland, yet she replied in a low, well modulated voice:

"Pardon my reverie, Mr. Raymond; but while looking at this beautiful valley, I was wishing that I might have the power to preserve the glories of this quiet evening. What a dreamy landscape!"

"Yes, it is gorgeous! I have never seen more exquisitely tinted skies; and the peace and quietude of the place has a wonderfully soothing influence. I really believe it has served to impress Miss Moses. From what Warren had often told me, I feared I should find her extremely hoydenish, but it seems that he was mistaken, or else she has changed very suddenly," he added, as he glanced down the road, and caught a glimpse of white dresses half-hidden by the trailing vines; then, after a few moments' reflection, concluded, "I am glad she has proven to be as she is, for she will bring light and life into my dull home."

"Yes, Mr. Raymond, your ward is a very beautiful, and at the same time, an unselfish and unspoiled child. She is passing through the character-forming period of her life, and what she learns and absorbs now, will be of untold value to her in the years that are to come.

"She tells me that she delights in the old Masters, and that she finds great pleasure in reading Virgil and Homer, which is certainly unusual for one so young as she. Girls of her age too frequently become interested in vapid, injurious literature. This morning I found her deeply absorbed in Poe's Prose Works; and also, in that weird, and too often misinterpreted poem, 'The Raven.' There was a slight frown upon her lovely face, yet blended with it, a

sadness, as she closed the volume, and softly repeated
o'er and o'er:

“ ‘ Ah, distinctly I remember, it was in the bleak De-
cember,
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon
the floor ;
Eagerly, I had wished the morrow, vainly had I sought
to borrow
From my books, surcease from sorrow, sorrow for the
lost Lenore,
For the rare and radiant maiden, whom the angels
named Lenore
Nameless here forevermore.’ ”

“ When she discovered me, she flushed, I presume
at being caught at anything so romantic as reading
poetry, and picking up her hat, hastily ran away, and
I soon heard her sweet contralto in the garden.”

The peculiar cadence of Constance's voice, as she
repeated a part of that wonderful and immortal crea-
tion of Poe's, caused Raymond to wonder; he felt
that the woman before him longed for something—
something which had never yet fully become a part
of her life, and his deepest sympathies went out to
her in her loneliness.

There was a long pause, in which each was wrapped
in self-communion. He earnestly longed to be pos-
sessed with supernatural powers, that he might fath-
om her thoughts. After a time, he led her to talk
freely of life as she had found it.

"Mr. Raymond, years and years ago, my home was in this valley, and this is one reason for my becoming so abstracted and apparently forgetful of my surroundings. Papa and mamma came here when the Nation was struggling to dismember itself. I was born here, and the early part of my life was spent rambling among the flowers, and beneath the swaying branches of yonder elms." Her voice grew pathetic in its earnestness, as she continued:

"Ah, how I loved the stern face of those rugged cliffs! For many years, like familiar friends, they greeted my childish eyes with the purpling dawn; and as it were, smiled in silent benediction upon my peaceful home. The birds, the blossoms, were all dear to me, and my soul sang exultantly all day long. Now, it is changed! Down by the distant hedgerow were the white-washed quarters of the negroes, and at eventide, their soft mellow notes of song were wafted to the great house there—" she pointed to a grove at the right.

"Years fled; the slaves, with few exceptions, wandered to distant homes; misfortune came, my father sank beneath the load and left us to struggle with an encumbered inheritance. The panic of 18— caused countless failures, and we, like many others, sacrificed our all for a mere pittance, and moved to the Garrison. At this point her voice grew harsh, and Raymond looked more closely at her. She was sitting upright, with tense features, and her eyes flashed;

then, suddenly seeming to remember that she was conversing with a stranger, she became confused, and her beautiful face flushed crimson as she arose from her chair, saying:

"Pardon me, Mr. Raymond; I quite forgot myself; but my trials for the past few days have been very severe, and my brain seems bewildered."

Raymond answered with a strange tenderness in his tones:

"My dear Mrs. McDowell, no apology is necessary, and there is nothing to pardon. It is but natural that being in this spot should recall to you memories of the past, and I hope the time may come when you shall return to the valley never to leave it again."

She little knew that the meaning was even deeper than his words as he held out his hand, which closed slowly over her slender fingers with a gentle "Good-night!"

A pale moonbeam filtered through the trees and fell across her face, as she stood motionless where he had left her. His last words—perhaps his tone more than the words—rang in her ears like the sweetest music. Still what did it all mean? Heavens! had she been unwomanly? No—yet—yet—the words he had spoken were remarkably singular, and again she fancied his hand trembled as it held hers for that brief moment. Ah, this mystery, this inexplicable sense of contentment which took possession of her when he was near, she could not account for it; and

how gladly her memory lingered on his low tones. Suddenly, as if electrified, she clasped her hands to her temples, and whispered: "No, no! It is impossible! He is dead! It cannot be! It cannot be! and yet, how like—" her voice faltered, and died away in a sob.

CHAPTER XXI

MANTIE came running up the steps, and her quick eyes discovered something unusual in the attitude of Constance. "Come, dear Mrs. McDowell, you are sad. I am going to cheer you. Della," she called to her friend, "go to bed when you get ready; I am going to see my boy Hal."

She walked down the hall with Constance, and both seated themselves by the bedside of the sleeping child. Mrs. Davidson had long since retired, and Constance dismissed Chloe for the night.

"Now, Mrs. McDowell," said Mantie, who placed Constance in a comfortable arm-chair and seated herself on a soft rug at her feet, "tell me what it is. What has gone wrong? Despite our short acquaintance, I have learned to love you so dearly that I notice every change in your dear face, and I assure you that I am one who can be trusted, even with state secrets. Did my guardian say anything to hurt that poor sensitive heart of yours? And what made him go walking so swiftly down the drive with hands clinched, and his lips so white? Why, his face was so pale and stern that I could see it even in the moon-

light. Please tell me, dearie; I long to comfort you and I am sure something must have happened." Thus pleaded the young girl as she placed her sunny head upon the knee of her new-found friend and looked dreamily at the shaded lamp.

Constance was silent for a long while, then stooping, softly and tenderly kissed Mantie, and running her tapering fingers through the golden curls gazed lovingly into the pure face uplifted to hers. Although Constance had known Mantie less than a fortnight, she knew that the girl was her sincere friend, and knew also that in this world of shams such a friendship meant a great deal to her in her loneliness. She knew too that Mantie was not so insistent from any sense of curiosity, but that she really longed to console and, if possible, be a help to her. Therefore, she was soon deep in the meshes of her life's romance. Her voice was hardly above a whisper when she touched on some painful memories, but Mantie softly stroked her hands and urged her on. After a time it became easier, and between pauses, she told of Jack Brainard; of how he had come into her life; how gentle he was; how he had shown her every consideration, every lover-like attention, and her girlish heart had become his—his—only to be crushed and trampled in the dust. At this, Constance's voice grew metallic, cold, unforgiving, and tremulous with suppressed anger.

"Mantie; I was a young girl, reared among the

hills and unfamiliar with any, save the pure, true sounds of nature. The singing birds, the babbling brook, and the rustling leaves had been to me the sweetest music. He came from that cold unfeeling world where men are adepts in winning the love of innocent, true hearts, for mere pastime, and then like withered rose leaves cast it to the four winds.

He was gay, debonair, possessing all the fascinations of men of the world, and, like them, merciless. Despite the warnings of older and wiser friends, I loved him—nay, idolized him. I was jealous of the sunlight that he loved, of the books he read, of anything, everything that kept him away from my side.

“I had another suitor who pleaded with me. He, too, was devoted. The warm impetuous blood of my mother’s race flowed in his veins, yet I spurned him. Then his love turned to hate; a bitter curse was uttered against my happiness, and with a patience born of desperation, he waited for the fulfilment of his curse.

“A year passed, but on the wings of love it seemed but a day. Jack, the gay, happy, thoughtless Jack was with me; and the glorious hours we spent wandering through the sylvan dells and scented vales were touched with gold. Often we would ride far over the rolling prairie to the West; again, we stood by the murmuring waters of the Grand, and watched the tinkling waves as they sang their way to the sea.

"When we chanced to meet Bart Nelson, he glowered at us and would clinch his hands with undying bitterness. Death lurked in his eyes. My mother feared him and often warned me. She also had strong misgivings of Jack, even while she loved him, and told me to be careful not to allow my heart to be so completely at his mercy. As time passed Bart grew more reckless; stories of his wild escapades were on every lip. In a time of imperative need he forged an instrument bearing my mother's signature; the paper came into her hands and was used as a means of protection. Then he went away vowing eternal hatred against my happiness.

"Time sped. Jack had fallen into evil ways. Stories of revels too horrible to repeat came to my friends, my mother, myself. At first I would not believe one word against him; to do so, was to sign the death warrant of my own happiness.

"One day came into my life the overwhelming disaster that crushed all my hopes. My idol lay in the dust, and the pedestal upon which I had placed him was obscured by clouds black as midnight. Perfidy was stamped upon the brow of Jack. Proofs of his waywardness could not be refuted. My sun went down behind clouds which had turned from crimson and gold into a dull leaden gray. My star of love had set. The sweet day-dream was at an end and my heart was broken.

"One wild pleading letter came asking me to see

him, but then—ah then, with my brain on fire and my heart turned to stone, I answered him. Heavens! how the words flowed from my lips. I told him my love had turned to bitterest hate. Ah me! if men only knew how they are exalted by a true woman; if they but knew in what radiant, sunny, unapproachable altitudes they are placed by such, I sometimes vaguely wonder if they would not make an effort to remain there. But alas! I had learned my lesson. I did not question the truth of all that I had heard, and at times I tremble to think that there might have been some mistake, but the die was cast.

“Yet, deep down in my soul there lingered a pity for him. Months after I had sent him away he left his home, broken in health and spirit, and when last heard of was in the mining camps of Colorado. At long intervals there were rumors of him, but at last all trace was lost and I know not whether he be living or dead.

“As you know, the wrath of Bart Nelson still threatens me, for when Jack had proven so unworthy of my love Nelson came and renewed his suit, to be repulsed with redoubled scorn. That was years ago, Mantie, many long troubled years.

“After a time, I met Charles McDowell, and he loved me with a noble, sincere, loyal love; and one bright autumnal day he led me to the altar. That sleeping child is his image. While I did not love him in that mad, wild, unreasoning way which comes to a

woman but once in a lifetime, still I respected him and loved him in a calm, peaceful manner, which in this world is much better than the idolizing love." Here a flood of tender memories overcame her, and she began weeping. Awed and interested by what she had heard, Mantie arose and placing her arms about Constance, said:

"Don't cry; please don't! It hurts me so, and oh, I am so sorry for your unhappy life, and I appreciate your confidence, which shall never be betrayed. Now lie down on the couch and rest, for your poor nerves are all unstrung. Lie down, dearie, and I will watch Hal just as carefully as you."

Constance lay down on a couch in the room; Mantie spread a light cover over her, and was soon rewarded by hearing her breathe regularly. Then stepping lightly across the room, she turned the light still lower, and resumed her place by the bedside of the child, while thinking seriously over the bitter-sweet story to which she had been so attentive a listener.

Much that had recently come under her observation seemed very mysterious, and a perplexed expression rested upon her young face as she tried to put two and two together, but she could reach no satisfactory solution of the problem. From what Warren had told her, she knew some very unusual circumstance was connected with the past of her guardian; she also knew that he had spent years in the West. Al-

though she had been with him but little, she could not remember ever hearing him mention the name of any lady. While she was practically a stranger before coming to the Plantation, she had met him at long intervals, since he was the administrator of her estate, and had been so true to his trust that its value was ever on the increase, and at the end of each quarter, she received a check for a very liberal allowance. It puzzled her as to why he should have selected this lonely though lovely spot in which to reside. At last she murmured to herself:

"I love mysteries, but I love them more when I am able to unravel them; and I will see through this one, or my brains are for nothing. Aunt Chloe must know something about it."

CHAPTER XXII

At the end of a week, little Hal had so far recovered as to be able to move about the house. He became the constant companion of Mantie, and objected strenuously when his mother told him they would return to the Elms the following morning.

"No, mamma, I'se not doin' ; I'se doin' to stay here all the time." Then he hurried over to where Raymond was seated, and climbed upon his knee. Phillip looked at the little fellow with humid eyes, as he gently stroked his curly head.

"My boy, I should love above all things to have you stay here always ; but your mamma has the best claim on you, though when you are entirely well you may come back for a long visit." Then Hal clambered from his perch and went away feeling much grieved.

Della and her friends were out in the grounds, and their merry laughter rang joyously as they viewed the futile efforts of old Joe, who was trying to mount an unruly broncho. Mantie had gone into the kitchen where Aunt Chloe was busily engaged in polishing the tinware to a brightness which would reflect her good-natured face. Climbing upon the corner of a table, the little Miss sat swinging her feet to and fro

as she munched a juicy apple, then when Aunt Chloe's head was turned, she threw the core at a cat purring contentedly under the range. Drawing her hand across her mouth, a mischievous twinkle came into her eyes and she hummed the chorus of an old plantation melody. Joe had made Chloe acquainted with the young lady's "doin's," and thus far she had managed to keep out of her way.

"Aunt Chloe," she said, while her slippered feet beat a tattoo upon the table-leg, "Aunt Chloe," she called louder, "there's a bug—a centipede crawling up the back of your dress; there, it is right close to your neck, the nasty thing!"

The pan which Aunt Chloe was polishing fell to the floor with a clatter, and her eyes were extended in horror as she turned around quickly. "Fo' de lan's sake, knoc' et off quick!" she screamed, as she tried to run towards the table.

"Go 'way! go 'way! don't come near me. Ouch! Oh! oh! what do you mean? Go 'way!" Mantie now stood on the table, jumping up and down and motioning Chloe to keep away.

"Oh! there it is right in your wool. Good-by, Aunt Chloe. How sad! What will poor Joe do?"

Up went Chloe's hands, and she began to scream and fan the air, vainly striving to rid herself of the venomous reptile.

"Lan' ob hebben! hab mussy on dis niggah! Oh, et am bitin'! Dah! I feels de pizen!" with this

she made a dive for the door, only to have her way blocked by the tall form of Raymond.

"Oh, Ma'se Phillip; de debblish t'ing hab done pizened yoah Chloe, an' I'se gwine t' die. Sabe my soul. Joey, Joey! Fa'well t' de valley ob de Fo'-teen Mile!"

By this time Della came running, followed by Mrs. Davidson and Constance. Mantie stood on the table, somewhat abashed at being caught red-handed, while Chloe went whooping about the room stumbling over tables and chairs. Joe came rushing in and grasped her about the waist.

"What am ailin' yo', honey?" he said, and Chloe cried:

"Joey, yoah honey am no mo'; a velociped' done bite yoah Chloe, an' she am a-dyin'. I feels de pizen an' et am cou'sin' fro my veins lak fiah, Joey. I'se gwine t' die."

"Wha' et bite yo', Chloe?"

"Dah, Joey," cried Chloe, jumping up and down, clasping her neck with both hands.

"Clar t' goodness, I kain't fin nuffin'."

"Go 'long, yo fool niggah; doan de young lady say et wah clos' t' my nec', an' doan I feel de pizen ob de t'ing in my veins? Oh, I'se gittin' blin', Joey; lay me down t' die."

Just then Joe discovered a pin in her collar where it would prick her at every move, and clutching it, he held it before her closing eyes.

"Heah am yoah velociped'; heah am de t'ing wha' bite yo', yo' wench," he said contemptuously.

Chloe looked at it, and her eyes turned to where Mantie stood looking demurely out of the window. "May de good Lawd hab mussy on dat young pusson dah by de windah."

At this, all eyes were turned in the direction of Mantie, and it dawned upon the spectators that she had been amusing herself at the expense of Chloe.

Silently Chloe took the offending pin from Joe's fingers, and walking over to a table laid it down. Adjusting her turban and smoothing her rumpled dress, she began setting things aright. Mantie came slowly from her station, saying innocently:

"May I help you, Aunt Chloe?"

"Yas, yo' may sho' 'nuff, by jes' gwine outen dis heah kitchen, caze yo' hab mos' kill ol' Chloe."

"Why, what have I done?" asked Mantie in an injured tone.

"Huh! Whyfo' yo' axes dat quistion? Didn't yo' tol' Chloe dah am a velociped' on huh; an' doan yo' git 'pon de table an'—an'—Missus, yo' jes' lebe Chloe 'lone heahaftah."

"Well, really, now, Aunt Chloe, I thought it was a bug, a real live bug, you know."

"Yo' kno' dah wah no bug dah; yo' jes' scah de po' ol' 'oman 'bout t' deff!"

"No, indeed, Aunt Chloe, but—but——"

"No, yo' doan but; lan' ob goshin! I done butt

obah eberyting in de house, and Missus see me, an' Ma'se Phil. Now jes' t'ink ob et—goodness alibe!" she looked at Mantie, her eyes snapping.

"Why, dear me, Aunt Chloe; I wanted to ask you a question, and you wouldn't even answer me. I thought I would make you; just to see if I could, that's all."

"Ax me a quistion—me?"

"Yes, you, Aunt Chloe."

"What am et den," asked Chloe with less heat, and much curiosity.

Mantie brightened instantly, yet she apparently ignored Chloe's request, continuing: "You can tell me, I'm sure; and I'm just dying to know." Then she laid a slender hand on Chloe's arm and said, in a coaxing voice: "You will tell me, now won't you, Aunt Chloe?"

"I dunno kno'; mebbe," muttered Chloe, who was being disarmed by the innocent look, and gentle pleading of her tormentor.

"Oh, I am sure you will, you dear old Chloe; but—"

Mantie paused, looking old Chloe squarely in the eyes, "you know, don't you? I see by your eyes that you do!"

"Fo' de lan's sake, wha' am yo' talkin' 'bout?"

"Why, about what you know, of course."

"'Bout wha' I knows? 'Deed Missie, yo' am 'sterious; what does I know?" asked Chloe, excitedly.

"Hold over, and let me whisper in your ear, Aunt Chloe, for I don't want any one else to hear, or to know but myself." The old woman bowed her head, and Mantie tip-toeing, whispered:

"Aunt Chloe, tell me, who is Phillip Raymond?"

A sickly smile came to the face of Chloe.

"Hebben and earf, wha' yo' mean?"

"Exactly what I asked; who is Phillip Raymond?"

And before Chloe could add a word of denial, Mantie continued:

"You know, and you must tell me; must, do you hear?"

"Who am he, den, ef he am not who he am?" gasped Chloe. "I—I—oh, hab mussy!"

"Do you want me to tell you, Aunt Chloe? I can do it," said Mantie, who resolved to play a strong card; "hold down—Phillip Raymond is Jack Brainard."

"De kingdom come," faltered Chloe, as she sank limply back into a chair, "ef she ain't guess de truff."

Her face wore a troubled look as she sat eying Mantie, who stood unconcernedly and exultingly in front of her.

"Why, certainly, it is the truth; but mind you now, no one is to know but us. To-night, I will come to your cabin and you can tell me the whole story." With this, Mantie walked slowly away.

CHAPTER XXIII

THAT night, Phillip Raymond seated himself at his desk. In his hand he held a letter upon which his eyes were fixed, yet he did not decipher the words. A face—sweet, dreamy face, and eyes with long curling lashes was gazing at him through the mist of bygone days.

His conversation with Constance McDowell and her recounting of scenes well remembered by him, burned in his soul, and to-night he had brought forth from their hiding-place a package of letters, a faded photograph and a lock of chestnut hair. When he had looked long at the image upon the card, he took up the letters one by one and held them in his hand.

"Ah!" he murmured. At last, taking up a letter which had concluded their correspondence, he unfolded it and gazed at the words as if entranced. Having read it several times, he held it between his fingers.

"That was the last! Ah, my love, my love! what madness!" For a long time he sat meditating, and Mantie, who was strolling beneath the elms, saw his bowed head, and her heart bled for him—for this strange, taciturn man. She would learn all from

Chloe, and when she went to the Garrison, she would—well—she did not know what she would do, but a look of earnest determination came into her eyes.

Della was always rambling alone through the wood with no company except Fido. In fact, each of the party had decided to follow her own inclination, a course which afforded Mantie much satisfaction, for she wanted to be alone that she might investigate this strange mystery which had thrown her into a fever of excitement. Mrs. McDowell had invited her to the Elms, and she was going, most certainly, since her discovery, for in some way she felt that she might be instrumental in bringing about a reconciliation, though her hopes sank when she remembered the cold glitter in the eyes of her friend the night she related the story of her life. In a few days, Della with the other girls would leave the Plantation. She would go to the station with them, and from there to the Elms.

One by one the lights went out in the house; only one was left gleaming in the den of Phillip Raymond. Joe came in from the fields, and Chloe spread a simple supper for him, which he ate in silence. When he had finished, she washed the dishes and closed the pantry door for the night. This done, she brought out chairs in front of their cabin door. Joe lit his pipe and puffed contentedly, emitting clouds of aromatic smoke. Mantie came slowly over the lawn, her white dress gleaming with silvery sheen in the

moonlight. A light shawl was draped gracefully over her shoulders, while the wind tossed her sunny hair as she moved toward the home of her humble friends.

"Say, Uncle Joe," she said maliciously, "didn't you think that bu-bu-bug which you found on Aunt Chloe this morning was a large one?" as she curled up in an old willow chair like a frolicsome kitten.

"Yah! Yah!" laughed Joe, as he turned to his wife, who was disdainfully sniffing the air, her nose elevated in high dudgeon, as if she would utterly ignore the presence of the others.

"Missus, dat wah de funnies' t'ing I ebbah see; 'clar t' goodness, Chloe almos' bre'k my ahm."

"Chloe'll bre'k yoah haid, dat wha' Chloe'll do," she sniffed, smoothing her apron diligently.

"Why, honey, yo' jes' jump up'n down, up'n down, an' de pans rattle on de flo', an'—"

"Yo' jes' shet yoah mouf, Joe Waitie; I hab ce'tain'y hed 'nuff ob yoah gwine on, an' ef yo' doan lef' me be, I'se gwine right t' Ma'se Phil wid yoah doin's, dah now," exploded Chloe, her eyes blazing.

"Uncle Joe forgets that he lost his equilibrium the morning we girls landed here," put in Mantie, casting oil on the troubled waters, "and disgraced himself by tumbling over my new hat."

For some moments nothing broke the silence save the chirp of a cricket lost in the tangled masses of

the alder bushes. The moon shone serenely upon the valley of the Fourteen Mile. In the distance, the cliffs with their white imperturable faces looked upon the scene. Suddenly, as if aroused from a deep reverie, Mantie turned to old Joe with a serious expression upon her usually merry face, and asked: "How long have you lived here, Uncle Joe?"

He hesitated, and seemed at a loss how to reply, then said:

"'Bout two yeah, Missus."

"Why, it was my impression that you came here something like thirty years, or more ago. Were you born here, Joe?"

"No, Missus; I'se bohn down in Mississip."

"Then when did you come here?"

"Et wah betwixt sixty-one an' five."

"Where did you live then?"

"Wall, I libed wid de ol' Missus."

"Who was your Mistress, Joe?"

"Why, Mrs. Davidson, ob co'se."

"Then you have always known her?"

"Yas'm."

"And her daughter, also?"

"Lan' sakes, yas'm; dey's my white folks, an' I'se knowed 'em ebber sence I c'n recollect," said Joe, much mystified as to the reason for so much questioning.

"You always lived with your Master and Mistress, did you, Joe?"

"Why ob co'se! Wha' yo' 'spec' I'd lib? Look heah, Missus, am yo' axin' all dese yere quistions fo' wha'?" asked Joe, with an uneasy look upon his ebony face.

"Oh, well; I'd like so much to hear you tell of the old times. Joe, you must have been very faithful to your friends!"

"Yas'm dat I is; nebbah yit hab I flunked one ob 'em."

"I think you are quite right, Joe; for I too have learned to love your people, especially your young Mistress. Tell me of her, Joe. When here, she seemed to be so sad that my heart ached for her."

Mantie had gradually led the unsuspecting Joe on, and now was nearly in a position to make him betray his Master's secret.

Chloe sat silent in the shadows, listening to what was being said, as Joe cleared his throat: and continued.

"Missie Mantie, ol' Joe hab be'n in dis worl' fo' a long time; cain't jes' tol' yo' how many yeahs, but et am nigh on t' sixty, mebbe mo'. I wah bohn on de banks ob de Mississip' ribbah b'low Memphis. De ol' Ma'se libed dah on de plantation, an' w'en we com' wes', we wah toted heah on a steamah, called de Idle-wil'; den we camped on de banks ob de Gran' fo' a mont' while dey was a-buildin' de house, an'—an'—"
Joe stopped, for he could not extricate himself.

Mantie seeing his dilemma, concluded his sentence by saying:

"Then you moved to this almost identical spot, where you have ever remained; isn't that true, Uncle Joe?"

"Hab I ebbah tol' yo' dat dis wah de spot?" asked Joe, surprised.

"No, I guessed that much."

"Wall, yo' bettah min' 'bout guessin' et t'ings."

"Now, Joe, you have always known Mrs. Davidson's family; you have been near Mrs. McDowell from her childhood, and you know all about her," said Mantie leading Joe into deeper waters.

"I ce'tain'y does."

"And you have known Phillip Raymond a long time, too."

"Ob co'se! Ob co'se!"

"How long have you been here, Joe?"

"Wall, I—I—kain't jes' 'member et dis partiklah minut," and old Joe floundered helplessly, but at last managed to stammer, "Nigh on ter 'bout two yeh, Missus."

"Why, Joe, you just said you had known him a long time, didn't you?"

"Wall, ef I said dat, I wuz a-lyin' t' yo'," said Joe with a grimace.

"Not at all, Joe; you were telling the truth, but didn't mean to, of course. Now, please don't try to deceive me." She arose and walking directly in front

of him, stood and gazed steadily into his eyes for a moment, then said impressively:

"Joe, if Constance McDowell or Jack Brainard were to hear what you have said to me, they would think your chances for heaven very few."

At mention of Brainard, Joe leaped to his feet, his eyes almost popping out of his head, and regardless of the fate of his much-loved pipe, let it fall to the ground, shattering the bowl to pieces. His hands trembled, and he presented a pitiable spectacle.

"Sit down, Joe," said Mantie calmly, as she returned to her own chair, "I am no ghost."

Joe fell, rather than sat down, his lips muttering: "I done knowed de mahn'n' dat gearl come t' de plantation, dat she'd be de deff ob dis ol' niggah."

Chloe who was an amused listener, broke the silence with:

"Joey, dah am mo' cu'yus t'ings in de worl'. De young leddy knows all 'bout Ma'se Jack Brainard, an' she jes want t' mek' yo' tol' huh de truff; an' yo' bettah tol' huh, fo' she am one ob de pussons dat c'n see inter de future ob events."

Joe shook his head sorrowfully.

"'Tain't dat, Chloe; 'tain't dat; ef she tol' Ma'se Jack, den we lose ouah cabin, an' we'll hab t' go 'way f'om de plantation, wha' we be'n so comfor'bl'."

Hearing this, Mantie said: "You dear old souls! You need have no fear; I shall guard your secret. No one, not even she, shall ever know."

Being thus reassured, the old darkies became communicative, and Joe regaled Mantie with many romances of the old times.

"I wah young w'en we come heah wid de Ma'se and Missus, an' w'en we lef' de valley fo' de huntin' groun' ob de Pawnee an' de Osage. We saddle de hosses an' tuhn t' de wes'. Fo' days an' days we'd ride 'cross de pahrarie tel de runnin' wattahs ob de Red Fo'k wah reached, den Ma'se an' de gem'n wid 'im 'ud lef' me in de camp, w'ile dey go inter de fores' an' kill de b'ar an' de deah, an' flung de shiny perch on de banks."

Joe became lost in these reminiscences, yet his soul was stayed upon an All-Wise God, and he was at peace with all the world. In conclusion he turned his earnest eyes to Mantie, and said:

"W'ile yo' am mischeevous, yo' am lak' de li'l' Constance; yoah soul am puah, an' yo' am in de han's ob de Lawd. Yo' am yinnercent ob de ways ob de worl', an' yoah life am like de fus' bref' ob spring-time. Once 'pon a time, de li'l' Constance wah full ob de lub ob de good Lawd; but Missus, de time come w'en de po' li'l' t'ing beg fo' deff, an' t'-day she am sadder'n de sea wabes. I dassent tell yo' de story; et am not in my powah, but Ma'se Phillip am Ma'se Brainard, an' he am heah t' lib an' die in de valley ob de Fo'teen Mile. Et wah heah dat he met de li'l' gearl; et wah dar by dat stun wall dat dey ustah stan' on moonlit nights, while dey hearts spoke in wo'ds

ob lub, an' dey eyes shine bright wid de peace which pass de undahstan'in'." As Joe continued, his voice became tremulous, as if a burden rested heavily upon him. He said to Chloe:

"Las' night, honey, yoah husban' dreamt a dream, an' all day et hab be'n a-ha'ntin' 'im. I thought Ma'se Phillip come t' me an' say, Joe, dah am signs ob ebbil hubberin' obah de home ob de li'l Constance. Dah am teahs in huh eyes; dah am sorrah in huh heart. Yo' mus' go t' de Elms, an' fin' out wha' am de mattah. Jes' den I wake, an' while I wah a-layin' dah, I heah de ba'k ob a fox out dah in de wood. Et ba'k foah times, an' I fro salt in de fiah, den I sleep a'gin an' dream de same t'ing obbah, an' obbah."

"Who-oo—who, hoo-hoo," cried an owl far out in the forest. Instantly Joe was on his feet. "Chloe, yo' heah dat? dah am sump'n' gwine t' happen!" Then he turned and entered the cabin, leaving Mantie standing there awed by the mournful cry. Chloe was silent, and Mantie could see by her face that she showed deep sympathy with Joe's depression.

"Good-night, Aunt Chloe," said the young girl as she left the cabin and walked towards the house. Glancing up, she saw that the light still burned in the room occupied by Phillip Raymond.

CHAPTER XXIV

It was on the following Tuesday that Mantie's friends signified their intention of leaving the valley of the Fourteen Mile. Raymond had Joe get the carriage ready as it was their intention to catch the evening train north. All were busy packing, and Chloe bustled about with great activity. Joe roped the trunks and helped carry them to the wagon which was waiting near the carriage, the last adieus were spoken, and as they went speeding down the shaded lane, old Chloe waved them a last farewell.

Mantie went to the station to see them off. The parting was affecting, and as she gazed after the disappearing train tears came into her eyes, for she felt that the last link which bound her to her former life was severed. But her young spirit was bright and elastic, and with happy anticipations she was driven to the Elms to pay the promised visit to Constance McDowell.

Little Hal espied the carriage rolling down the graveled road, and with nimble feet sped to call his mamma who hastened to greet her guest. Joe went in and after spending an hour with the servants,

promised to return for Mantie when she should end her visit, then drove towards the valley of the Fourteen Mile.

Constance led her guest into the parlor where her mother occupied an easy chair near the west window. Mantie noticed the yearning look resting upon the face of Mrs. Davidson as she held out her slender hands and welcomed her to the Elms.

Late in the evening, as it was beautiful, the younger ladies could not resist a stroll down by the river where the dreamy influence of Nature hushed their voices into silence as they wandered in and out along the pathway beneath the old trees. The moon sailed majestically through the heavens, filling the earth with a radiance almost equal to that of day. Low voices floated out upon the wings of zephyr as some merry rowers glided by upon the small swelling waves, but tiring at last, the two young ladies walked leisurely back to the house half hidden by vines and trees.

Soon after nine Mantie was shown to her room, where she sat lost in reverie, from which she aroused herself and sought her pillow. After a refreshing sleep she was up with the first streaks of dawn, and finding the family still asleep, stole into the garden where Constance found her bending over the nest of some tiny birds that had builded in the thorn tree growing there.

She turned with a glad heart at the approach of

her friend, and as she recounted the discomfiture of Chloe over the "velociped," her merry laughter rang on the still air of dewy morning, startling a bobolink from his high perch.

Her natural elasticity of spirit asserted itself wonderfully, as she talked gayly of the weeks she had spent in the valley of the Fourteen Mile, which amused Constance very much. Eliza came to them to announce that the morning meal was waiting, after which they planned an outing. Several of the young ladies of the Garrison were invited to accompany them, so they immediately proceeded to make elaborate preparations for the occasion, and the next morning, the company began to gather at the porch of the Elms, and one girl called from the driveway:

"Goodness, girls! you are all so late; the dew will be gone before we get started, and my new frock will miss its baptism."

"We'll be there in just a moment," answered Constance, as she hurriedly spread a covering over the ample basket which was to be carried by Cæsar to a point in the wood. This done, she donned her wide-brimmed hat, and going softly up to her mother imprinted a loving kiss on the silver-crowned brow, then joined the bevy of chattering girls, followed by the benediction of Mrs. Davidson who watched them until they were concealed from view by the trees.

Soon the party entered the timber and followed a beaten path which led far out into the forest. Little

Hal was with them, and his sturdy legs carried him everywhere. Cæsar plodded along with his hamper containing the "goodies", as Mabel Wilson expressed it; all was happiness, and a smile lighted the face of Constance, as Mantie exclaimed:

"Dear me! One can almost see the forest as described by Irving. Look at the tangled masses of vines and the rugged trunks of the trees. It is a wonder to me that the indomitable Tonish does not step right out of the wood and halt us, or that some Osage hunter does not twang his bow and send an arrow in our direction. O girls! that must have been a jolly time! Just think of it! Why, they were here when this country was filled with the Red men who wore blankets and moccasins, buckskin shirts, and leggins with long fringes on them, and carried 'toothpicks,' and bowies and long rifles; but they were men, brave, true, chivalrous men. Ah, dear me!" Thus she continued to talk as they moved farther and farther into the hills, which took on the appearance of the primeval.

Finally they came to a bend in the river where it was decided that they spend the day. Cæsar placed the basket on a moss-covered boulder, while the merry-makers roamed at will about the virgin forest, gathering bouquets of wild flowers.

To the impulsive Mantie, the time glided away on wings, and she expressed surprise when she heard the voice of her friend calling her to luncheon. The

scene was an impressive one, and in after years Mantie recalled it with pleasure. For in addition to the beauty of the natural scenery, she read the true depths of Constance McDowell's nature and learned to look upon her as one whose patience was of an exalted type. Her smile beamed on every one, even though at times a sad far-away look came into her eyes, and a tinge of melancholy in her tones.

Luncheon over, the pleasure-seekers dispersed, and as if by accident, Mantie found herself with Constance standing by the banks of the little stream that farther on plunged into the Grand. They were silent, each busy with her own thoughts, but Mantie could perceive an unusual air of abstraction about her friend.

"What is it, dear?" asked Mantie. "There is a frown upon your face, and I'll wager that your thoughts are not of the kind to bring peace."

Constance started as if suddenly awakened from a dream, as she replied: "Yes, Mantie, I was thinking, thinking of the past, and its ghosts were trooping about me as you spoke."

"Ah me! you should not have such fancies. Why, just look at this beautiful woodland, and bury the past in a grave which thoughts even cannot resurrect. Listen to the chirp of the birds, the bark of the chipmunk, and the caw, caw of those ravens perched on yonder limb."

"Mantie, dear, I would give anything could I see

life with your eyes, which find so deep a joy in all the mysteries of nature and can so easily put away the past for the present, for then I might at least be contented, if not happy."

They stood in the mellow light, talking of the hills and watching the silvery trout sporting in the clear depths of the water at their feet. Mantie's bright eyes beamed with the joyousness of youth; her cheeks were flushed, and life to her was a rose-tinted dream. She listened eagerly to Constance as she related legend after legend of her people, and portrayed their characteristics with a readiness which was captivating in its simplicity. At last Constance said:

"Mantie, far up on yonder mountain-side lives an old man, a man who has grown old among the hills and who sits alone in his cabin with no one about him. He is older than any one knows! he is the soothsayer of the hills and is looked upon with awe, yet he is harmless."

"Oh, how I should like to see this Sage of the Hills," cried Mantie in a fever of excitement.

"Well, come," assented Constance, and tying the strings of her hat under her chin, she moved away in the direction of a dim trail leading up the mountain.

They toiled up the rugged slope until they reached a well-defined path where they paused for a moment's rest, then walked on for some distance until they came upon a little cabin. Mantie paused, and her eyes drank in the romantic surroundings while her

heart thrilled with inexplicable awe, as she followed her conductor into the small clearing which had been made about the habitation. She had thought to find a wigwam of bark and skins, so was in a measure disappointed.

From the interior of the dwelling came a low chant, unintelligible to Mantie, yet its tones were soothing and filled her with self-forgetfulness for the time being. As the noise of their approach was made known by the barking of a dog the chanting ceased, and in an instant an old man stood in the doorway, looking at them with shaded eyes. Mantie could see that he was bent with the burden of years, she dared not guess how many. When he had looked at them a short time, he moved slowly towards them and held out his hand to Constance, saying:

"Welcome! daughter of the Red man, welcome!" Then turning, he looked intently at the face of Mantie, and was silent.

"Yellow Plume, this is my friend; she has come with me to visit you."

A smile hovered about the lips of the old man, as he held out his hand to the younger girl. "Welcome, daughter of the pale face! Welcome to the cabin of the Yellow Plume!" Mantie allowed him to take her hand, after which he waved them to a seat and stood regarding them kindly. Turning to Constance, he continued: "For what has the daughter of the Garrison come to the cabin of the Yellow Plume?"

Drawing his blanket about him, he stood waiting. The dignity of his race was manifest, and it was easy to see that he was the last of those who had come from the Appalachian Hills. His eyes gleamed somberly as they wandered about the forest and rested upon a little mound which sloped up to the base of a towering oak.

At last, Constance said: "Yellow Plume, we have come that you might relate the story of our people to this young girl."

"Ah, daughter of the Red man," said he, pathetically, "why do you come to the Yellow Plume? Know you not that his heart is sad and yearns for the happy hunting-grounds of our fathers?"

"More hearts than that of the Yellow Plume are heavy," she answered simply, her tones so earnest that the aged Indian looked at her more intently.

"Ah, the heart of the Singing Bird too, is sad! Yea, I see it in her eyes, and the heart of the Yellow Plume burns for his friend."

Mantie was greatly impressed. The form of the old Chief righted, and he stood before them the incarnation of human dignity, his long hair falling in plaits in front of his shoulders. He was silent for a time, as if recalling scenes of the past, then began:

"My children: many suns have passed since the great white father at Washington sent his runners to the wigwams of my people with the speaking paper which was to bring sorrow to the hearts of the Red

man. He came in his robes of war and bade the Red man turn his face from the towering pines of the Ocmulgee. No longer could we go with our braves to the salt waters of the East. The heart of the Red man burned; we were sad, sad unto death.

"Our runners sped away to the hunting-grounds of our brothers, and before seven suns were past, they had returned. All was gloom. The Sagamores came from the lands of the Everglades and from the banks of the Appalachia; then came the Sachems from the hunting-grounds of the Tuscaroras and the Catawbas. The council-fire was kindled upon the sweet waters of the Altamaha, and the pipe of peace was lighted.

"The forest was fragrant with the smell of the pines and the flowers bloomed upon the hills, but the Great Spirit was angry, and our women wept alone in the wigwams while our young men sat about with bosoms swelled with pain. There in the land of the Appalachia were the graves of our fathers; and the villages and wigwams where they were born. Our quivers hung upon the lodge-pole, for we were at peace with the pale face and our hearts were glad with song, but now the deer stalked unheeded in the hills, while the cry of the bittern boomed sadly from the marshes, and the bear lingered unsought in the brakes.

"For scores of great suns we had lived beneath the towering pines, and loved the silent hills. Our nostrils loved the soft winds that blew from the east-

ward laden with salt, for they made us strong and eager for the chase. Each night, when the tapering shadows lightened in the east, we asked Manitou to leave us in peace that we might guard the graves of our fathers, but no—no—the runner from the father at Washington turned deaf ears to the pleadings of the Red man, and said in a voice of thunder, Go! go! your homes on the banks of the Altamaha are no more! Go yonder to the setting sun with your braves and your women.” He pointed with his long knife to the West where the Pawnee lived, and where the buffalo roamed upon the prairies.

“In vain we had pleaded; in vain did the cry of our children echo among the hills; but the Great Spirit shut his ears. The deed was done; the council-fire was quenched. Silently the Sagamores of the Tuscaroras and the Catawbias vanished among the shivering pines; the wigwams were hushed: our warriors spake in whispers, while the sachems stalked alone in the shadows with their heads bowed upon their bosoms. The day was come, and the wailings of our women reached to the skies, but alas! alas!” Here his voice became tremulous.

“Ere many suns, my children, the fagots were lighted for the last time; again the pipe of peace was passed from lip to lip; our hunters had returned from the last chase; our scouts came from the borderland of the Seminoles, and all was at an end. One more word with Manitou, and the march began, the march

that was to be for many moons marked with the bleaching bones of my fathers.

“Yellow Plume stood upon the banks of the Ocmulgee, and watched his people pass out of the valley, and over the hills. They were to go westward. The way was long, and the trail led through the hunting-grounds of the Chickasaw and the Dakotahs. We were following in the wake of the buffalo, and the wigwams on the banks of the Altamaha were as silent as the voice of evening. Some of us went down the Great Father of Waters; others wended our ways through the unbroken forest, and were moons in finding our new homes. Many of us sickened and were called into the land of spirits. Yellow Plume was left, but his squaw sleeps in a grave upon the banks of the Mississippi, and there his heart turns when the winds sigh through the trees and the snows fall in the winter.”

At this juncture, a sound of footsteps was heard coming down the mountain-side. The narration of Yellow Plume was interrupted, and Phillip Raymond stepped into the open.

CHAPTER XXV

As Phillip Raymond strode up, a look of glad surprise lighted his features. Extending his hand to Mantie, he bowed to her friend, saying: "This is indeed a surprise."

Constance did not reply, regarding him with a puzzled expression. The presence of this man affected her strangely, and she could not read her own thoughts clearly.

"Why, Mr. Raymond!" exclaimed Mantie, as she noted the situation. "You are no more surprised than are we. Who would have dreamed of seeing you? Not I to be sure; but you have not spoken to our host."

At this Constance arose, saying: "Yellow Plume, this is Mr. Phillip Raymond!" Steadily the eyes of the aged Indian sought the face of the new-comer and lighted with a half-forgotten memory, as the latter advanced, saying:

"I am glad to meet Yellow Plume, and hope he will regard me as a friend."

"If the pale-face is a friend to the Singing-Bird, he is welcome to the cabin of Yellow Plume,"

answered the Indian with dignity, as he motioned Raymond to a seat.

Placing his rifle near him, and throwing his game bag upon the ground, Raymond seated himself. Mantie looked first at Constance, then Raymond, and at last glanced at Yellow Plume, who stood motionless.

"Please do not allow me to interrupt your conversation," Raymond said, addressing Constance. "I was hunting, and by the merest accident stumbled upon this spot."

"Indeed, Mr. Raymond, you have not interrupted us. Yellow Plume was relating to Mantie the incidents connected with the removal of our people from Georgia," she replied with an effort to appear at ease.

"Then doubtless I have missed a treat by not arriving sooner."

"That you have!" said Mantie; "you should have heard the story. It was so sad; worse than the fate of the Arcadians. It was indeed stranger than the story of Evangeline, and too true. Poor people!"

The eyes of Yellow Plume beamed upon the young girl. "The daughter of the pale face speaks with a straight tongue," he said, with simple earnestness.

"I regret not having heard the story," said Raymond; "while it is recorded in history, only the bare facts are given, besides, as is customary, the stronger side has the preference. In truth, the United States

Government has been ruthless in some respects, especially in its dealings with the original owners of this great republic."

"The Indian has been driven from the salt waters of the East. The pale face promised him wampum, but paid in crooked words," said Yellow Plume, as his form straightened and his eyes flashed with smouldering fire. "They are—" his words were arrested by Constance, who left her seat, and placing her hand on the arm of the Indian, said in a voice that touched her hearers:

"Yellow Plume, the Great Spirit hears you. Remember the far-away banks of the great river where sleeps the other heart of my friend. She is with Manitou—she is looking down from yonder cloud, so be not angry." Her sweet sympathy touched the heart of Yellow Plume.

"Ah," said he, with a flickering smile, "the Singing Bird speaks with the wisdom of a Logan, and Yellow Plume heeds her words."

Raymond never forgot the scene. His eyes lingered on the face of Constance McDowell with unconscious earnestness, and he wondered that she could not fathom his undying love for her. Mantie had arisen from her seat, her young heart bounding with unwonted excitement. She felt that Constance had gone to Yellow Plume, not altogether because of his vehement utterances, but to hide her own emotions. Could it be possible that she recognized Jack Brain-

ard in the man before her? She had seen her start, turn pale, and her form grow almost rigid, as she endeavored to repress some overpowering emotion.

Raymond looked at the strange pair in silence. The tall form of Yellow Plume reared itself above that of the fair woman at his side. His face bore traces of quiet resignation as it was lifted heavenward, his eyes gazing steadily at the fleecy clouds that floated upon ethereal wings. Slowly his lips moved, and reaching out both hands, he cried:

"Yes, yes! Kiswee is there. The Singing Bird is right. Her gentle spirit comes to Yellow Plume on the wind; he hears her laughter in the rustling leaves, the songs of the birds, the call of the thrush. She sings upon the waves of the Grand. She remembers the wigwam that nestled upon the banks of the Altamaha. Kiswee is there among the clouds that hide her face. Yes, she is there. Ah, I hear her calling! She beckons Yellow Plume from over the mists of dewy morn, saying the Great Spirit waits in the forest to welcome him to the happy hunting-grounds. Yes, she is there—there—there—" he added, in a low dreamy voice.

Raymond was awed. Mantie drew close to where he stood and rested one hand upon his arm. Constance moved a pace back and gazed away westward. Each felt the solemnity of the moment; each knew that a heart was crying for peace, that peace of the

great Beyond, and the simple faith of Yellow Plume found an echo in their souls.

At last the aged Indian turned to where Mantie and Phillip stood with bowed heads.

"My children," he said, "the heart of Yellow Plume is not here. The light of his life burned out when Kiswee sang the death song upon the Father of Waters, and he longs to go. His love is as deathless as the hills, as the winds that blow, and he is sad. None but the Singing Bird comes to the home of Yellow Plume;" he continued, turning to Constance and laying a fatherly hand upon her shoulder. "Ah, yes, the Singing Bird, too, looks beyond the clouds.

"Many moons, so many that the numbers are lost, she came to the cabin of the Yellow Plume. Her heart was broken and the daughter of my people cried with me for rest—rest. Then it was that Yellow Plume told her of the Great Spirit and His love, and the Singing Bird listened."

As he spoke, the eyes of the Indian did not leave the face of Raymond, who turned deadly pale, and Mantie felt his arm tremble beneath her hand. Constance noticed it too. "Mr. Raymond," she cried, "you are ill!"

"It is nothing!" returned Raymond, steadying himself with an effort, and forcing a smile. "Just a twinge of rheumatics; I shall be feeling better in a moment. No, no water, thank you!" he added, as

Yellow Plume hurried up to him with a gourd well filled.

"Now I am all right," he said, as he leaned against a tree. "I have been exposed too much, I presume, and this climate does not quite agree with me. There, Mantie, thank you, my dear! In a short time I shall be entirely well."

"Mr. Raymond, it is but a short distance to where our party is, and I can dispatch Cæsar for a conveyance," insisted Constance.

"Thank you very much for your kind offer," replied Raymond, "but there is no cause for alarm," and he smiled faintly at the look of concern resting upon the beautiful face of his ward.

Presently some one halloed far down the mountain-side. Constance started as she looked at her watch: "It is quite late!" she exclaimed. "Come, Mantie, we must hasten. Good-by, Mr. Raymond; I sincerely hope your indisposition may be slight, and that we shall soon have the pleasure of welcoming you to the Elms. My mother desires very much to meet you again."

"Thanks!" said Raymond. "Please give her my kindest regards," and bidding both adieu, he watched them until they had disappeared; he and Yellow Plume were alone.

"The pale face spoke to the Singing Bird with a crooked tongue," said the Indian contemptuously. Raymond was silent.

CHAPTER XXVI

SOME days after the fight between Bart Nelson's gang and the posse led by Talbot, two men, heavily armed, rode into a little town several miles north of the head-waters of the Rattlesnake. They were pushing their jaded horses to the utmost limit of animal endurance, which betokened the fact that they were on some errand of importance. Looking neither to the right nor left, they rode down the main street of the village, and stopped in front of the office of Dr. Bertrand. Throwing the reins of his horse to his companion, one of the riders dismounted, and walked into the building, casting as he did so a furtive glance at the loungers in front.

"Sump'ns up," drawled one loiterer to a friend sitting near him, as he complacently changed his quid from one side of his mouth to the other.

"Yep," answered the party addressed, "but it's none o' my bizness, an' I calk'late thet 'tain't none o' yourn, neither."

"Be you the doctor?" asked the man of a gentleman sitting behind the rude counter which extended across the rear of the building.

"Yes, sir, I am Dr. Bertrand; what can I do for you, my friend?"

"Wall, I reckon es how ye can go 'ith me out'n the kentry a ways."

The doctor gave his customer one look, as he arose from his chair. "Yes, sir; I suppose so," he said.

"Wall, then, git yourself ready, fer we ar'n a hurry," said the man as he walked towards the door, leaving Dr. Bertrand to prepare for the journey. The doctor had long been accustomed to such proceedings, and without further conversation was soon ready. His horse was led around, and mounting, he galloped away with the men in his rear.

"Darn glad ye war hum, doc," said one of the men, after they had traveled a short distance. "The Cap'n is hard hit, an' seein' nuthin'd do but this, he sent us after yer."

"What is the matter?" asked the doctor.

"Oh, darn it! wait till ye git thar an' fin' out fer yerself," answered the man, as he winked knowingly at his companion. This sufficed to close the doctor's lips, and the cavalcade rode on in silence.

The shades of night began to settle, still the horsemen did not swerve from their course, but plunged deeper and deeper into the fastnesses of the Flint Hills. The surrounding country grew wilder as they diverged from the highway and traveled a well-beaten trail leading in a southwesterly direction.

When they had gone about fifteen miles, they

halted. One of the men advanced to the doctor, and drawing a handkerchief from his pocket, said:

"Doc, my orders air ter hide yer peepers so's yer can't tell any tales when yer goes back t' town. Now yer in good company, an' ef yer does the square thing yer'll git well paid; so don't worry 'bout it," he added with grim humor.

The doctor was somewhat averse to the proceeding, but the man was obdurate, and knowing that he was completely at their mercy, he submitted and the fellow tied his handkerchief about his eyes, then grasping the reins of the horse, muttered: "Go on, Sam," and they plunged into the forest with the precision of old woodsmen.

When they had gone another mile, a halt was made; the cloth was removed from the doctor's eyes, and he looked about in surprise. A sloping glade lay before him, and a number of horses were grazing contentedly. Rough-looking men lounged about in attitudes of ease under the trees, their belts glistening with brass shells, which were companions to heavy Colt revolvers that swung at the hip.

Their garb was picturesque; wide sombreros, high-heeled, long-legged boots, and heavy flannel shirts open at the throat. Some of the men were engaged at card-playing while others were preparing the evening meal. Before a ruddy fire choice bits of steak spitted upon slender sticks driven into the earth; the savory smell of coffee permeated the atmosphere.

The men's laughter rang on the wood, and re-echoed, startling the timid birds from their rest.

Dr. Bertrand found himself in the retreat of Bart Nelson and his followers. Beneath a spreading oak, with his head pillowed upon blankets, lay the form of a man. About his brow was a bandage stained to a crimson hue; his face was pale, and his eyes gleamed with the fire of delirium as he stared at the newcomers.

"Here's the doctor, Cap'n," said one of the men, walking up to where the wounded man lay, adding to the doctor in turn: "Here's your patient." With this, he left them, and going to his horse, began to remove the trappings.

Bending over the man, Dr. Bertrand soon discovered that he had a high fever. Calling for a cup of water, he mixed a powder in a small portion of it and forced it between the lips of the sufferer. This done, he seated himself on a boulder and surveyed the scene with a careless eye.

Dr. Bertrand was not a tenderfoot, nor was this the first visit he had made under similar circumstances; consequently, he apprehended no danger and resolved to make himself as comfortable as possible. In a few moments the effect of the powder was noticeable, and as the patient became quiet, the doctor began to examine his wounds. While thus engaged, three or four men lounged up to the spot and looked on silently.

When the bandages were removed from about the head of the afflicted man, Dr. Bertrand discovered an ugly gash in the scalp, which had become much inflamed from lack of attention. With the deftness peculiar to his profession, the doctor soon had the wound cleansed, and applied the necessary remedies. This done, he inspected his patient with some curiosity, the pale intellectual face appealing to his imagination; and he wondered what could have driven this man from the pale of civilization. When the night was advanced to twelve o'clock, Nelson opened his eyes and called for a drink of water.

Dr. Bertrand went to a rivulet near by, and filling a cup carried it to his patient, saying: "I hope you are feeling better!"

"Yes, much better, thanks to your skill," replied the man in a voice which indicated refinement.

"You have had a close call, my friend," remarked the physician, hoping to induce his patient to make some disclosures as to the cause of his present condition.

A savage gleam darkened his eyes, as he replied: "Yes, very close; but Bart Nelson is far from being a dead man yet."

"So you are Bart Nelson?" commented Dr. Bertrand.

"Yes, I am Bart Nelson; what of it?"

"Nothing whatever; only I thought perhaps you might be one of the boys from the Creek Country,"

answered the doctor. "Reckon you wouldn't like to tell where you got that?" pointing to the wound.

"Well, not exactly. We just had a brush with the rangers, that's all; and really, I do not care to discuss the matter," said Nelson, as he closed his eyes and turned on his side as if to sleep, saying, as he did so: "You can turn in, and the boys will show you the road in the morning. It might not be healthy for you to try to get out of the hills without some one to pilot you." Then the young outlaw drifted into the land of dreams, knowing that his camp would be guarded against surprise by his men, several of whom stalked about in the gloom, listening to every sound.

The weather being still somewhat warm, the doctor had no difficulty in finding a place of repose. Morning dawned. The camp was soon astir, and Nelson calling a man, said to him:

"Bill, you and Sam go with the doctor, and see that you cover your trail well, for you cannot tell who is prowling about these hills."

After he had partaken of a luscious steak and drank some steaming coffee, Dr. Bertrand said to Nelson: "You will be all right, Bart, if you take the medicine I have left you and keep quiet for a few days."

"All right, doctor," answered Nelson, as he handed him a roll of bills. "Am much obliged to you for coming in such an unusual way. Remember that you

know nothing when you reach home; a word to the wise, you know, doctor," he added humorously.

Bertrand smiled knowingly and covered his lips with the tips of his fingers. Then mounting his horse, permitted his guides to conduct him from the place in the same manner he had been brought.

A week passed before a move was made on the part of the banditti. The leader was able to look after himself, and a spirit of recklessness took possession of the motley crew. One bright morning Nelson assembled his men. His handsome face was a study as he stood flicking his boot with a rawhide.

"Boys," said he; "I must leave you for a while. You can go to the head-waters of the Deep Fork and wait for me. My mission has not been accomplished, and by the eternal, Bart Nelson is not to be thwarted. Vengeance is mine, and Phillip Raymond, or whatever he chooses to call himself, shall pay the forfeit with his life. Never will I leave the valley of the Fourteen Mile while she and the man who stole her from me lives; curse him!" With this, the face of Nelson became contorted and savage beyond expression. Turning, he swung into his saddle, and with a wave of the hand, rode away into the forest.

CHAPTER XXVII

"'CLAR t' goodness, Joey," exclaimed Aunt Chloe on the evening of the day Phillip Raymond met Mantie and Constance McDowell at the cabin of Yellow plume, "et am 'mos' da'k, an' Ma'se Phil hab not come home. Dat am cu'yus, fo' yo' kno's he nebbah stay out'n de night, nebbah. De co'n pone am ruinin', an' de vitel's am gittin' col'."

"Ma'se Phil los' his way in de wood, mebbah; but doan yo' worry, Chloe, 'bout dat, fo' de moon'll soon be f'om behin' de hills, 'n den Ma'se Phil'll fin' 'imself, an' come home," commented Joe.

"I hopes so, but dis niggah hab be'n feelin' creepy de whole day, an'—an'—Joey," she whispered, "dah am sump'n' wrong, sho's yo' bohn."

"Go 'long, Chloe, yo' am too 'stitious; dar am nuffin' dat c'n happen dat I knows ob."

"Huh! Yo' jes' min' wha' Chloe tol' yo' ! Joe Waitie, dah am cu'yus gwines on in de aih ob de valley. 'Peahs t' me lak' drefful t'ings gwine t' happ'n," concluded Chloe, with a shake of her woolly pate.

A heavy mist blanketed the earth, which lent to the scene a ghost-like aspect, and when Joe turned

away from the window, he drew the blind closer, muttering in an undertone:

"'Deed et am cu'yus. Ma'se Phil nebbah wah out ob de house so long aftah da'k befo'."

Joe's perturbation seemed only to irritate the excitability of Aunt Chloe, who began to hum an old plantation melody. As she sang, her fears took wings. Memory flew back to the old days; and they lived again on the banks of the Mississippi. Gradually her soul crept into the song, lending it a pathos that sank deep into the heart of Phillip, who had entered unperceived, and stood listening.

"De good Lawd am lookin' down on de valley, Joey; I feels et in de berry bones ob my body," said Chloe.

"Dat am de truff, Chloe; an' he hab got his eyes on Ma'se Phil. Lan' sakes, dat am a cu'yus man. T'-day when he lef' de fa'm an' went out'n de wood, he tol' me t' come bac' t' de house; dat he wah gwine t' go 'lone int' de hills," then he added reflectively, "an' he hab not come bac'."

"There is where you are mistaken," said a voice from the doorway, and Raymond stepped into the room.

"De Lawd hab mussy! ef 'tain't Ma'se Phil! 'Clar t' goodness, yo' mos' scah me t' deff," cried Chloe. "De co'n pone am jes' ruin' 'count ob yoah absence, an' de vit'els am col' as de ice chis'."

"Oh, well, Chloe, that is all right. I have already

had my supper. I happened to fall in company with young Canfield this evening, and he would have me go over to the Senator's with him. You know it is not long until Court convenes, and Canfield is much concerned over the outcome of the case against young Elmore, who is accused of a very grave crime. Senator Bainbridge has been retained as counsel for the defendant, and they have offered me a very handsome fee to enter the case also."

"An' yo' am gwine t' wo'k fo' de po' boy!" exclaimed Chloe, clasping her hands. "Laws, I jes' hopes yo' will, Ma'se Phillip, caze ob his po' mud-dah."

"Yes, Chloe, if nothing happens, I will be the junior counsel in the case. I am tol' that it all came about through drink."

"Chloe hab be'n 'quainted wid de fambly ob Tommy Elmo' fo' de pas' twenty yeah, an' dey am 'mong de bes' people ob de distric'."

"Very well, Chloe. I had hoped to keep out of public life, yet in this case—well, I shall enter it; not for the sake of the young man, for I scarcely know him, though his mother was at one time quite well known to me. Yet," he mused, "she has failed to recognize me thus far. Indeed I must be changed. While the circumstances are very much against her son, she believes him innocent, and he is so presumed by law until proven otherwise. Joe," said he, "do you know any of the particulars of the case?"

"No, sah; only jes' what I'se heahd floatin' 'roun' 'mong de folkses obah de hills. 'Pears lak' he wah comin' f'om de line, an' had sump'n' t' drink, an' dey all got 'toxicated; den a fuss come up, an' de man got killed, shot, some way, by Tommy Elmo'. Oddahs say dat his gun 'sploded, an' he shoot hisself; an' oddahs say dat he wah shot f'om de bushes."

"Yes, I see!" commented Raymond, "yet rum was the primary agent of his death." Raymond repaired to his room, and taking down a volume, he read far into the night.

During his residence in the valley many people had visited his house, and by some means it had been noised abroad that he had at one time been a disciple of Blackstone, but had discarded his practise. The rumors had, in being circulated, reached the ears of Senator Bainbridge, who sought his aid in the case of Thomas Elmore, a young man of good family who was charged with murdering one of his companions while in a state of intoxication. A true version of the affair had not as yet been rendered, so far as was known by Phillip; and it was only through the earnest solicitation of the Senator, with whom he was on terms of intimacy, that he had consented to again enter the court room in behalf of a client.

A week passed. It was only a few days until court would convene. Raymond had met in consultation with Senator Bainbridge, and they had gone carefully over the evidence in the case, and were ready for

trial. In speaking to some of his friends relative to the approaching term of court, the distinguished Senator said:

"Gentlemen: Phillip Raymond, who for some time has been living on the Flint Plantation, has consented to help me with the case of young Elmore. I am most agreeably surprised in Mr. Raymond. He has been here some time, but it is only recently that it became known that he is an attorney. Why, I never would have dreamed of such a thing being possible," then he lowered his voice, and added, "if I mistake not, there is some mystery in the man's life. Something has driven him from the busy, exciting life of work; yet to save me, I cannot imagine what it could be. He is a gentleman, polished, diplomatic, astute, very guarded and non-committal. He is a fine lawyer, too, and will make the closing speech in the argumentation of our case."

As the time set for the trial of Thomas Elmore drew nearer, the whole countryside became interested in the result. Popular sympathy was with the defendant, though the proof against him was very strong. The District Attorney was confident of conviction. Nothing in the way of comment had been heard coming from the stern lips of Phillip Raymond, who remained close at home. He was studying the situation with a determination to win. He would be ready on the day of trial.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WHAT transpired between Yellow Plume and Philip Raymond after the departure of the young ladies never became known, though one could see that a great change had come over him. It appeared as if some ending, even death, would be a relief, yet no word of complaint ever fell from his lips. The lines of his face deepened; his eyes burned with a feverish flame; his form became more bowed as the days passed, and often he would sweep a hand before his vision as if striving to blot out something. That something was the past; yet the future was an empty chrysalis. Nothing remained to him; he would only find rest from the torments of existence when the grave covered him.

That evening, after tea, Constance was much depressed. A sense of unrest siezed her, and she desired to be alone.

The replies she made to questions asked by her mother were so irrelevant, that the latter exclaimed! "Why Connie! what on earth ails you?"

"Nothing at all, mamma," answered Constance

evasively, then in a short time added: "I fear our outing was too much for me; I shall be all right in the morning, mamma dear."

And rising from her seat, she walked over to the piano and began to play. At first her slender fingers were desultory in their movements, for she was seeking the chord of a half-forgotten melody that she used to play. A look of ethereal bliss settled upon her features while she poured out her soul in music. The instrument appeared to become imbued with the melody. Now it was laden with pathos and wailed tremulously; again it swelled like a grand diapason; then leaped and laughed with joyous harmony; again it wept as if in deepest sorrow; now it was a seething torrent, then the merry babble of tinkling brook.

Constance McDowell was lost in the mazes of a fantastic dream. She was unburdening a pent-up soul. As the last pulsing note quavered and died away, she arose, her face pale, her eyes gleaming with unspoken anguish, and the smile on her lips belied its birth. Bending low, she kissed her mother, saying: "Come, Mantie, let us retire."

Reaching their room, Mantie curled up on a divan and silently watched Constance, who stood in front of the mirror brushing her long silken hair. She felt that a tumult raged in the soul of her friend, and waited anxiously for her to speak. For some moments nothing could be heard but the soft sweeping stroke of the brush.

"Mantie," said Constance, at length, "I feel that I owe you an apology."

"What for, Constance dear?" said Mantie starting up.

"I have been so lost in my thoughts that I fear I have failed to do my duty as a polite hostess; for which I hope you will pardon me."

"Most assuredly I will, in case there is anything to pardon; but as I am here indefinitely, I hardly expect to be treated altogether like a fashionable caller."

"I am glad you feel at home, dear, but I have been unpardonably absent-minded; and the events of the day have upset me somewhat, I dare say."

"Why, in what way? Did Yellow Plume's narrative make you nervous?"

"No, not that, exactly; it was something else."

"What, Constance, dear?"

"It is something which can hardly be told."

"How strange! Is it such a great secret that you cannot tell?"

"No; that is, I am not sure; maybe it was mere fancy."

"Fancy! Now you are becoming mysterious, you naughty thing!"

"Not mysterious, Mantie, no, not in the least; far from that, yet."

"Really, I shall soon have hysteria unless you ap-

pease my curiosity. I am a veritable daughter of Mother Eve."

"Well, it was not Yellow Plume who disturbed me; I have known him from childhood, and am familiar with his every fancy, almost."

"Who, then? who, pray, if not your Sage of the Hills?"

"It was your guardian, Mr. Phillip Raymond."

"Oh, oh! My guardian!" gasped Mantie. "Why, how wonderful! How could he possibly disturb you, or any one else for that matter?"

"That is where the trouble lies; I fancied I had met him before, or at least had known some one who resembles, or would have resembled him had he lived to this day; and each time I meet Phillip Raymond the conviction grows stronger. Heavens above! if I did not know the other to be dead, I should be positive that this man is Jack Brainard."

"Jack Brainard! You mean your lover,—that Brainard?" asked Mantie, shading her eyes to keep Constance from reading the truth in their amazed expression.

"Yes, Mantie, that Jack Brainard. I knew no other, but it is not he—cannot be, for he died eight or ten years ago in a mining camp in Colorado. It was in Victor, if I recall the news item rightly," added Constance. Then she lapsed into silence, and communed with her own thoughts for a long while.

Finally, Mantie said: "Constance, could you love

Jack Brainard?" Mantie's voice was husky with excitement, while she clutched the folds of her loose wrapper tightly, her breath coming hurriedly.

It was the moment she had longed for, the hour in which she would learn the truth. Mantie had grown to love her guardian with a sort of filial affection, and it wrung her gentle heart to see the strong man suffer. She would plead his cause; surely, there was some way, some explanation which could be made whereby the abyss separating these two might be bridged; at least, it would be no harm to try," she reasoned.

She repeated the question, "Constance, if Jack Brainard were alive now, could you love him again, could you forget the past?"

Slowly the midnight eyes of Constance McDowel turned to Mantie; her slender form seemed to grow taller, and a smile of scorn curved her lips, which whitened with pain:

"No, never!" she said hoarsely. "His memory is enough to freeze the very blood in my veins. Would to God I could blot it out forever—yet—yet—oh, how I loved him in the long ago, but now——" and her voice grew metallic in its intensity, "now, that love does not ex——"

"Don't say that, Constance! Don't, for my sake; oh, please don't!" pleaded Mantie, as she divined the meaning of her friend. The pathos in her voice softened the iron which had hardened the heart of

Constance McDowell, who paused, and looked at Mantie strangely. A tremor ran through her frame. Could it be that this young girl was pleading the cause of Brainard?

"Heavens!" she thought. "Is my belief in his existence to be confirmed? No, no!" Somewhere she had a newspaper clipping taken from the Denver Republican setting forth his demise in the mining camp of Victor. No, the idea was preposterous! Yet, she could not fathom the intense zeal of Mantie Moses. There was some mystery, some deep, inexplicable mystery.

"Why, Mantie, dear! how vehemently you speak! What could Jack Brainard be to you, who never knew him?"

Mantie was on her guard, and replied with a winning smile: "Really, he could be nothing to me; still the delightful romance of the situation appeals very strangely to me, and I would not have one golden link broken, no, not for worlds. To me, it would be sacred. You remember, Constance, the story you told me one night when you were out at Mr. Raymond's. For days and days I have thought it over, wishing that he might be alive and that I might be the means of reuniting the bond that was broken years ago."

"Oh, Mantie," said Constance sadly, "that would be impossible, even if he were alive, which is wholly improbable. We should never meet again. The blow

inflicted by him was cruel beyond conception. There was not one extenuating circumstance which could be used in his behalf. No, not one. I have the matter all written and certified to, and know that it is true beyond all hope of refutation."

"How very sad!" said Mantie with tears in her voice. "No doubt you have both suffered much!"

"Yes, no doubt, no doubt," returned Constance, as she turned the lamp low and threw herself across the bed, where she lay far into the night thinking—thinking—wondering if there could possibly have been a mistake. Ah, heavens! In her insane anger she had not thought of that, then her soul cried in agony.

CHAPTER XXIX

At last the day for the convening of the District Court was at hand. Thomas Elmore was to face the charge of murder.

The scene about Greenleaf Court House was picturesque, bordered on the primitive. The low, rambling building was surrounded by an open space covering several acres. Soft velvet grass covered the ground; flowers bloomed in the wood. The dogwood and the laurel sent out their delicate perfume, while the blue-jay sang merrily in the tree-tops.

Men—silent, swarthy-faced men of stately mien, walked warily beneath the oaks, speaking in low tones. Light horsemen, clad in dark-blue edged with black, galloped swiftly through the ravines and across the hills, their sturdy ponies appearing eager for the fray.

As they coursed along, the dark, somber eyes of the riders flashed with racial pride. They were the harbingers of Justice, and woe to the rustler or boot-legger that crossed their path. At the saddle-bow hung the omnipresent repeater, accompanied by a heavy forty-five swinging on a belt bristling with

brass shells. They were the men that held in check the renegades of every clime, who sought the wilds of their beautiful land. Brave as the Spartan, chivalrous as the olden knight, they were ready to do and die in defense of duty.

For a day or more the citizens living in the rural districts had been assembling at the Court House. A steady stream of humanity wound its way to the Temple of Justice. They came in phaetons, buggies, wagons and on horses. Many brought their families and camped in the open, sleeping beneath the thick canopy of leaves. Bands of young men came from the extreme northern parts of the country, from the hills of the Barren Fork, and from Coowee-Scoowee with its sweeping prairies. Beautiful girls from the Seminary at the Capital; the stoical aborigine from his hunting-grounds. All came to mingle in cosmopolitan freedom, and revel in semi-feudal chivalry.

Gay, thoughtless youths laughed, while their fathers, dreaming of the inevitable future, sat silent in the shadows, looking with resignation at the onward march of events which would open their opulent Nation to the invading pale face; their hearts burning with the memory of the treacherous past, a past blurring the escutcheon of Columbia, leaving a crimson stain upon her brow like that of Pretoria on Britain.

They looked with sad eyes and pent-up hearts at

the evolution of time, seeing in the dim distance the overthrow of tribal relations, the disintegration of their race, the dismembering of their code, and at last the total absorption of the Red Man. Soon they would have to compete with the iniquity and avarice of the greedy, insatiable Caucasian, and their brows grew dark and lowering, their hearts bled for their brethren, yet they were powerless to resist; calmly they waited the final ultimatum.

With the dawn, all was astir. The day of trial for Thomas Elmore was come. Court opened promptly at nine, with Judge Walker upon the bench.

Slowly Senator Bainbridge moved down the aisle between the rows of stiff-backed primitive seats, followed by Phillip Raymond, whom he introduced to the Judge and members of the Bar. The District Attorney was in his place. He bowed pleasantly to the gentlemen, then proceeded to examine some papers handed him by the Court Bailiff. A suppressed murmur arose in the rear of the court-room as the Sheriff ushered in the defendant and moved inside the railing extending across the room. Every eye was upon him; necks were stretched in his direction, while the hum grew louder and louder.

Feminine eyes sought the bowed form of Mrs. Elmore, who was seated by her son, and grew dim, at thoughts of what the verdict might prove to be.

"Mr. Sheriff, you will open the Court!" said the Judge.

"Oyez, Oyez, the Honorable Court of this District is now in session. Order in the Court, please," cried the official.

Instantly, there was a hushed silence. The bur-r-r-r-r of voices died away.

"Mr. Prosecuting Attorney, are you ready in the case of Thomas Elmore, charged with murder?"

"Yes, your Honor!"

"Gentlemen of the defense, are you ready?"

"Ready, your Honor!" from Senator Bainbridge.

"Very well! Mr. Clerk, call the Jury." Instantly there was confusion. As their names were called each man filed into the jury box. The attorneys asked the statutory questions relative to qualifications, etc. Finally, the Jury was selected, and qualified to try the issue.

"Prisoner at the Bar, stand up," said the Judge in a husky voice. Slowly, Thomas Elmore arose to his feet, and stood between his attorneys.

"Mr. Clerk, you will read the indictment!"

The stillness of death settled upon the Court-room. Ears were strained that they might not miss a single word, the Judge wiped his spectacles, and setting them on the bridge of his nose looked down from his seat. It was the Judge now, not the friend; the Nemesis of the evil-doer, not the counsellor, as he said:

"Thomas Elmore, you are charged by the indict-

ment with the crime of murder. What have you to say? Are you guilty, or not guilty?"

"Not guilty!" came the answer from between lips that faltered, as the young man threw back his raven locks, and looked imploringly at the stern-faced Judge.

"Mr. Sheriff, the prisoner is remanded. Gentlemen of the Bar, and Mr. Attorney, we will adjourn Court until to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER XXX

THE previous evening, Raymond had been surprised to learn that his ward and Constance McDowell were guests in the home of Judge Walker. Later, Mantie explained their coming by saying:

"Every one is interested in this case it seems. Senator Bainbridge was in town last week, and told us you were to assist him in the defense, and praised your qualifications so highly that we could not resist the temptation to accept his daughter's invitation to visit her and attend the trial. Then Mrs. McDowell has known the family since they were children together, and up to the present time exchanged visits frequently, so it is quite natural for her to desire to attend; but the truth is, I desire above everything else to hear your speech. Will wonders never cease? I did not know that your profession is that of a lawyer."

Here Mantie became conscious of some one's scrutiny, and turning, saw Milo Canfield advancing towards them.

"My! How handsome!" she ejaculated mentally as the young man drew nearer.

Raymond extended his hand, and greeted Canfield very cordially. Canfield bowed to Mantie, as he said: "How pleased I am to meet you again, Mr. Raymond, and you also, Miss Moses."

"Mr. Canfield, I deliver Miss Moses into your keeping. I see my colleague beckoning me, and must leave you," tipping his hat as he walked away, leaving Mantie and Canfield standing alone beneath the spreading branches of a mammoth oak.

Since going to the Elms, Mantie had met Canfield on more than one occasion, and a glad look came into her eyes as Raymond left them.

A gentle breeze blew softly from the south. The sun was setting amidst a mass of crimson clouds. A cat-bird chirped upon the hawthorn. Groups of men and women sat beneath the oaks and sycamores, speaking in low tones. Scattered about the woodland were happy couples, laughing from lightness of heart as they talked in love-laden tones, telling over and over, the "Old old story." The scene was Arcadian, and one would not dream that this assemblage was other than one of pleasure, would not dream that a soul writhed in the throes of uncertainty in the little house half-hidden from view by the trailing vines of ivy and honeysuckle; or that a mother sat with bowed head, waiting the coming of dawn in fear and trembling.

Mantie and Milo strolled down by the stream. Constance McDowell loitered alone by a thorn-rose,

absently plucking leaf after leaf from the blossoms. She heard a step upon the graveled walk behind her. Turning, she saw Phillip Raymond advancing. She was startled, but there was no avenue of escape, so she was forced to accept the inevitable with a smile.

Raymond's head was bowed, and he was quite near before he discovered her presence. A tremor ran through him, as, with flushed face, he lifted his hat and bowed as he extended his hand, at the same time, exclaiming:

"Why, good-evening, Mrs. McDowell! I am delighted to meet you. How is little Hal? I hope he is quite well again!"

"Quite well, thank you!" smiled the lady.

"I am extremely glad! You did not bring him with you?"

"No! Mamma could not spare us both; so he is with her."

"Then I shall not have the pleasure of seeing my loyal little friend. You know I promised him a visit out home some time soon. You must let him come; Aunt Chloe and Miss Moses will take excellent care of him."

"Really, I fear he would be too much for them, although he is devoted to Mantie and declares he will go with her when she returns to the Plantation. He has not forgotten your promise, and often speaks of you. He would gladly take up permanent residence with Aunt Chloe at any time. Before they

moved away, the child wanted to be with her the most of his time. She is a dear good creature, and tells him such delightful stories."

By this time they had left the roses and were walking slowly about the sward. Their conversation drifted from national questions into that of theology, and at last centered upon the vital issue to the immediate community, the Elmore case.

"When Senator Bainbridge told us that you had consented to assist him, it was quite a surprise, even to your ward, who was not cognizant of your legal qualifications."

"Really, I supposed she knew; still, you see, I have traveled extensively since the care of her property and herself fell to me, and therefore am not very well acquainted with her. Warren, my solicitor, has supervised everything for the last several years, reporting to me only occasionally, when he knew where to find me. Then Mantie was in school, so that it is only since she came to the valley to reside that I have become acquainted with her."

"She is a lovely character; has so many admirable traits, and is attractive in every respect. Mamma thinks she is the most remarkable girl she ever knew."

"I am exceedingly proud of her, and find her uncommonly interesting and well-informed. My studies have found a rival in her to my advantage, as close application to them was rapidly undermining my health."

"That is good of her, as, doubtless, she makes the matter an object. Are you not afraid the worry and close study necessary in this case will be a detriment to your health?"

"That is a point I have not permitted myself to consider; still, it would make no difference. I believe the young man innocent, and feel that with a just and impartial interpretation of the law he will be acquitted."

"Oh, I do sincerely hope so, if only for his mother's sake. I have known her a great many years. Her son has well-nigh broken her heart by his escapades, and should he escape this time, it is to be hoped that he will have learned a beneficial lesson."

"Yes, indeed! I am told that rum has been the cause of his downfall."

"Yes, from all reports that is true. Until three or four years ago he was considered a model young man, and was recognized in the best Territorial society."

"Rum! rum is the greatest curse which afflicts the human race. Ninety-five per cent. of the crimes committed are either directly or indirectly due to its agency. Not only does it foster crime against the laws of God and society, but our commercial institutions are being undermined. For instance, France: She is sated with absinthe, and her moral status ranks lower with each decade. Men of bright intellect, of great possibilities and renown bow in abject

submission to the rule of Bacchus." As he spoke, Phillip Raymond's voice rang out, as if he had forgotten his surroundings. Suddenly, remembering her presence, he said:

"Pardon me! I had a friend once, whose life was wrecked on account of the cursed stuff, and I hate it! aye, loathe it with all the strength of my manhood. Would to God, I could stamp it out root and branch." Then speaking more composedly, he continued: "Intoxication is indeed the curse of this beautiful land; it will—"

The sound of approaching footsteps was heard, and Mantie Moses, leaning on the arm of Mr. Canfield, stepped into view. Mantie's big blue eyes opened wide as she recognized the two whom she herself would have placed in their present situation had she been consulted. Not desiring to show her joy and surprise, she dropped the arm of her escort, and running to Constance, said:

"Dear me, Mrs. McDowell! I thought you had gone with the fishing party. They wanted me to go, but ugh! I couldn't catch a fish in a fortnight," and her hearers smiled.

"In a fortnight! Are you sure?" queried Raymond, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Why, you know I couldn't! I never could manage to get those horrid, wiggly things you call 'bait' on my hook," said the saucy little lady.

"But," broke in Constance, "how about Mr. Can-

field? I'm sure he has had many experiences as an angler. He—"

"Yes, I should think so; both in the streams and on land—" Phillip paused maliciously, his words bringing confusion to the face of Mantie and a warm flush to Canfield's brow.

"You are horrid! both of you!" pouted Miss Moses. "Come, Mr. Canfield, let us leave them," she said with a shrug of her shapely shoulders, and pointing out the way, they walked down the alder-fringed path.

Phillip watched them until they were lost to view by the trees and shrubbery.

"I hope she may always be as happy as now," he mused.

"Yes, she certainly deserves it," said Constance.

"It shall be my one effort to make her so," replied Raymond. "I can do some good any way, for happiness is much sought after, but seldom found nowadays."

"You speak as if life were not worth the living."

"I had not meant that exactly. There are times in the lives of all, I dare say, when existence is a burden." His voice was earnest now, low and lingering, as if memory of other days held him. "True," he continued, "I presume it is destiny that some of us should drink life's bitter cup, while others drain the chalice of joy to its dregs. Some lives, I have no doubt, are peaceful, because of their uneventfulness;

others blighted by coming in contact with the world—at least I find it so in my travels. Then again, as was said a moment since, strong drink, for many, drowns the one chance of happiness. I have met scores of men, in other respects good and true, who have allowed the tempter to come—and—”

Crash went a rifle; a bullet spitted pitilessly through the leaves, burying itself in a tree just above Raymond's head. Bang! bang! again and again the spiteful bark of the gun rang out, clipping showers of leaves from the branches overhead.

Constance screamed. She heard the leaden messengers whirr through the air and thud into the oak at her side.

“Oh, my God! My God!” she murmured, as she sank at the feet of Raymond, limp and apparently lifeless. The noise of the shots caused consternation among the officials, who sprang from their positions of ease, and went running in every direction. Women were frightened; children cried; eyes gleamed with apprehension, and pistols were loosened in their holsters. For an instant Raymond was rooted to the spot.

“Dead! dead! Oh, my God!” Falling to his knees, he lifted the head of Constance McDowell and held her in his arms, while he ascertained if she had fallen a victim to the assassin. He could find no wound. Oh, joy! God was merciful, thought he. Her pale face rested upon his arm; and for the first

time in ten long hungering years he held the form of the woman he loved. Her eyes were closed, the long dark lashes fringing her cheeks. By the silvery light of the moon he could devour her face. Ah, how beautiful, how maddeningly beautiful. He kissed the raven locks that fell in tangled masses over his shoulder. Oh, did he dare profane those silent lips by one kiss—one quaff of heavenly joy? Yes, yes! it would be the last; and bending low, Raymond planted one long lingering kiss upon the lips of Constance McDowell.

All this happened in less time than it requires for recording. Mantie and Canfield had gone but a score of paces when the noise of firearms broke the stillness. Canfield sprang from Mantie's side, and making a detour, soon pushed his way through the bushes to where he had left his friends. As soon as Raymond saw him, he called:

"Canfield, where is Miss Moses? Quick, bring her quick. I fear some devil's work has been attempted. Bring Mantie. Quick, man, quick! The miscreant will evade us. There! the shots came from there—from the hill—from behind that sycamore. Damn the villain!" As Canfield rushed away, Phillip said huskily: "Oh my poor darling!"

Mantie came running, and pillowing Constance's head in her lap, sat stunned. The intense agony upon the face of her guardian smote her heart, and tears welled to her lovely eyes.

When Canfield related the particulars as he had heard them, people came hurriedly from all directions, and Constance was tenderly lifted and borne to the house of Judge Walker.

Soon afterwards she opened her eyes. Mantie was sitting by her side applying restoratives, while the light horsemen were scouring the wood for the would-be assassin.

"Mantie, Mantie, I was right! Oh, God! he is Jack Brainard, and it was Bart Nelson who attempted to slay him. I saw his evil face. It was Jack Brainard who saved my child from that devil in human shape. Oh, and I owe him a debt that nothing can pay—nothing—nothing! Yet," she sobbed, "Mantie, tell me, tell me what to do, or I shall go mad—mad," and the slender form shook violently.

While every effort was being made to capture the assailant, Phillip Raymond sat alone in his room. The blinds were drawn, and the lamp turned low. A warning had been given, he knew that his mortal enemy was near and that death lurked in the very air. He was powerless; the inevitable seemed approaching with resistless force; he was doomed. Yet, what did it matter? Had he not held her, his idol in his arms? Had he not imprinted one long last kiss upon her perfect lips, unresponsive, it is true, still they were her lips, he could not be robbed of that and he smiled a smile that would have wrung the heart of Constance McDowell into compassion, if not love, could she have seen it.

CHAPTER XXXI

MORNING dawned. Not a cloud obscured the skies. The men who had scoured the hills far and wide returned, bringing with them no trace of the man who had so boldly attempted to take the life of Phillip Raymond.

Constance McDowell sat upon the veranda of Judge Walker's home, pale from fright. Mantie was by her side, watching the light come and go in the midnight eyes. Every one was imbued with a sense of unrest. Men, grim of face, talked in low tones as they moved in squads of three and four towards the court-house. Milo Canfield loitered in the distance, casting wistful glances at the willowy form sitting upon the piazza.

Senator Bainbridge, Judge Walker and the High Sheriff passed down the vista of elms, and were hidden from view. Belles and beaux strolled contentedly beneath the trees. Dignified matrons watched their daughters from afar, and smiled at the pert sayings of the children. Raymond came slowly from his room and lifted his hat to the ladies with an unfathomable smile as he joined the Senator. Eight.

o'clock—eight-thirty—nine, the hour of opening court was at hand.

"Oyez, Oyez," came the words of the Court bailiff as the officers assumed their stations. A rush was made for the entrance by the spectators, and soon the building was jammed. The Sheriff went in with the defendant, who leaned on the arm of his faithful gray-haired mother. Lucille, the daughter of the Senator, came for Constance and Mantie. They must go, she insisted upon it. They were her guests, and she had her way. Through the influence of her father and the courtesy of the officers, she managed to have seats for herself and friends reserved inside the railing.

"Papa tells me that Mr. Raymond is to make a speech, and declares that he is a most eloquent orator. How he found out, I cannot say," she rattled on, "for I positively know Mr. Raymond to be the glummiest gentleman I have ever met, but that is what papa says, and he knows if anybody does," she concluded proudly, for she idolized her father, who was in his dotage about his lovely, and sometimes wilful daughter.

Senator Bainbridge saw the trio as they entered the dingy court-room, and meeting them at the cancell, smiled, and drew them inside, directing them to their seats.

The windows were up; a gentle breeze swept in, tossing the grayish hair of the Judge into a confused

mass. Birds sang in the trees outside. A babble of voices came from the audience. The District Attorney sat with his chair tilted back against the rostrum, while carelessly drumming the desk with his fingers or exchanging silent salutations with acquaintances who sat in the rear of the room.

Crump! crump! the luscious grass gave forth a crisp sound as it was cropped to the ground by the shaggy ponies browsing beneath the trees, while saddled and ready for instant use. At the bow hung the stake rope and iron stake pins. At the candel was strapped the "slicker," the ranger's bed on warm nights, and his refuge from rain on wet days. Guards lolled upon the grass, passing jokes with their prisoners, as was the custom of the times—times that have since become memories—times which gave life among the hills a savage charm. A new code, new ethics now exist, and the man with the gun has gone to the distant West, or been relegated into a prosaic ranchman.

"Mr. Sheriff, bring in the defendant." It was the Judge who gave the order.

"He is in the Court, your Honor."

"Very well; have the bailiff bring in the Jury."

Tramp! tramp! Twelve men of high integrity, and good moral standing; swarthy of countenance, high-cheeked, straight haired, locks black as the raven's wing; tall, lithe men, men whose eyes sparkled with purity of intent filed into the room. It was the Jury;

the men selected to weigh the evidence about to be adduced for and against the prisoner at the Bar, and whose eyes scanned their impassive faces as if searching for one gleam of hope; for one infinitesimal droop of an eyelash, a smile, but no, the law and the evidence alone must govern them. Suspense, dread, shuddering suspense—a pin falling would have struck with crashing noise upon the strained ear-drums.

An involuntary shudder shook the form of Constance McDowell. Heavens! the solemnity of Justice! A human life never appeared of such value before, and her hand closed upon the arm of Mantie.

"Justice, justice!" she whispered through trembling lips. "God grant that justice be rendered." Turning her face, she found the somber eyes of Phillip Raymond looking at her.

She became confused. Could it be Jack Brainard? She was not so sure as the previous night, yet something in her heart told her it was he. In his eyes was a look of resignation, not hope—no, did she wish it was? She cogitated in her mind and her heart cried with a strange new voice, but it was stifled and her imperious will stilled its pleadings.

A proud smile curved her lips and scorn sat enthroned upon her brow.

"Proceed, Mr. Attorney," said the Judge. "Call the first witness, Mr. Sheriff," said the Attorney, and James Mason took the stand, witness for the prosecution.

"No questions," said Senator Bainbridge, and another was called. There were but three witnesses for the District, and two for the defense. Another was called, and the taking of evidence went speedily on. Senator Bainbridge conducted the case for the defense, while his friend, Phillip Raymond sat mute at his side, now and then asking a question on some point which he desired made clearer to the Jury as well as to himself.

After he had caught the eyes of Constance, and had endeavored to fathom her secret, only to receive that haughty smile, he turned away, looking neither at her nor Mantie, the latter sitting with clasped hands, listening attentively to the questions asked by the District Attorney. The scene was new to her. Never in all her young life had she witnessed anything of the kind, and as question after question came from the lips of the Attorney, she looked at him, wondering if he possessed the far-reaching quality of mercy; for to her, his calm, lucid manner of forging the chain about Thomas Elmore was merciless, and she shuddered, while her soul echoed the words of Constance, as the trial progressed—"Justice, justice."

By noon all the witnesses, both for the defense and the District, had been examined. A chain had been forged, link by link about the defendant, and many were the pitying glances cast in his direction. There was not the slightest hope for his acquittal; the law,

that strong, unswerving cord which wraps its coils about the conduct of society had been offended, and it claimed its due. Thomas Elmore must forfeit his life to that appetite, which had robbed him, as was shown by the testimony, of reason, made a demon of him; he must pay the dread debt, which comes to all men, but not in the shameful manner which must be his. The demon rum was to be satiated for a time, at least, with his blood—his life-blood.

When the testimony was all in, the District Attorney rested his case; Senator Bainbridge did likewise. During the hours of that racking inquisition, the audience sat motionless; only the deep breathing of countless throats could be heard. A sense of the momentous question, as to the guilt or innocence of the defendant appeared to have fallen upon all, and they were silent.

At the noon hour court was adjourned for the midday meal; yet there were but few who cared to enjoy it. They were in suspense as to the outcome, and every one was burdened with the solemnity of the hour. At two o'clock, the District Attorney began his opening speech in behalf of the Nation whose dignity had been sullied by the wanton act of the defendant. His was a masterful presentation of the facts, as elicited by the testimony. He quoted from the pages of Holy Writ, demanding "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a life for a life," and

was confident of a verdict, just, and in accordance with the demands of outraged Justice.

For hours did he hold his audience with his burning eloquence, welding, with scorching words, fact upon fact, until his hearers were bewildered; only one thought found room in their minds, only one feeling was expressed by their faces—that of sorrow for the mother who sat with bowed head by the side of her son.

Constance's face retained its adamant expression. Mantie sat as one enthralled, while the torrent of burning words fell from the lips of the impassioned lawyer. Phillip Raymond sat by the side of Senator Bainbridge with bowed head, motionless, his face set, and his lips drawn to a line. A weariness, not called for by the trial, rested upon him, and was indicated by the nervous threading of his silvered hair. Mantie looked at him, her heart bleeding as she witnessed the terrible ordeal through which he was passing.

"I demand a verdict, convicting this man for the crime of murder; a crime which cries out in all its details for redress!" said the District Attorney in conclusion. A hush settled upon the assemblage, which was unbroken, as Senator Bainbridge arose to his feet, and began prefacing his address.

Going over the evidence in detail, he sought to impress the Jury with the false reasoning of his friend, the Prosecutor. Fluent words poured un-

checked from his lips, and the audience looked at the case through his eyes. "Ah, could it be," and a thrill ran through the crowd, which ended in a smothered sigh. They realized the situation, and dared not hope. The chain forged by the District Attorney could not be broken. The defendant must pay with his life, they reasoned, and waited with what resignation they could summon, the verdict of the twelve men occupying the box, the arbiters of destiny, where the life and liberty of Thomas Elmore were concerned.

The hands of the clock pointed to the hour of adjournment, when the Senator took his seat.

After having surveyed the court-room to see the effect of his words, he was disappointed, if he expected much, for that sea of faces was expressionless; the utterances of the District Attorney still echoed in their hearts—Thomas Elmore was guilty.

As the court was emptied, there was a sigh of relief, another respite for the anxious ones. A few more hours must pass away and be marked on the register of eternity before the sentence would be passed which would consign one of their race to the gibbet. The prisoner was remanded. Outside the prison bars the birds sang; through the grated windows came the song of nature. From afar, the call of the thrush was heard as he flitted through the thorn trees and laurels. A confused murmur of voices floated to the prisoner's ears as he paced to and fro

in his narrow cell, his head bowed, and his hands clinched.

Constance was deeply impressed with the scene which she had just witnessed, and Mantie could scarcely repress a shudder as a vision of the stern-faced Judge arose before her. The ringing words of the District Attorney made it impossible for her to forget the wall built around the man who, all day, had sat staring at his doom. She could see the aged mother sitting there beside her wretched son, with infinite trust written upon her features, manifesting that she would abide the decision of an infinite God, not man. He was her son, the support of her declining days, and he was innocent, yes, innocent, and she hoped against the inevitable.

Phillip Raymond was among the last to leave the building, and after leaving, made his way at once to his own room. A dull, dead aching racked his head and heart. He would be alone; he must summon strength to cope with the ordeal which awaited him. "Ah," he murmured, "she is not certain, she does not know for sure; yet, to-morrow I shall plead my cause with the energy of a dying man. She shall know how truly I have loved her, and then—then—what matters it? A numbness stole over his heart, for he had seen and defined the meaning of her scornful smile. She hated him.

CHAPTER XXXII

THAT evening there was to be a party at the home of Judge Walker and all the younger members of the Court were in an ecstasy of delight. It was whispered that Phillip Raymond's ward would be there, and each of the beaux was highly elated. Lucille Bainbridge was the hostess, and the evening promised to be one long remembered.

The low rambling house of the Judge was lighted by tapers placed promiscuously about the walls, and a profusion of flowers were arranged with artistic effect. The young men had secured the services of a drilled orchestra which would render music for the occasion, so success was assured.

The hour drew near for the arrival of the guests, and the Judge welcomed them cordially as he ushered them into the spacious parlors. Mantie marvelled. Could this be the austere man who had sat so immovable upon the bench some hours since? Surely, it was some other, for this jovial host's face beamed with kindness and his smile was infectious.

Suddenly, the viols began breathing soft strains, and as they swelled in volume, daintily slipped feet.

went tripping over the polished floor. Constance looked on with a face wreathed in dreamy smiles. She watched the graceful forms of her friends as they glided by her station, their eyes lighted with the gladness of youth. Matronly feet, too, played uneasily as the dance continued, while more than one fond husband remembered the days of "Auld Lang Syne."

Mantie was enraptured. Milo Canfield had but a moment before put in his appearance, and they were threading the mazes of a delicious waltz. He had come, he told her, from the Garrison; had ridden all the way, living in anticipation of this very hour. His words brought a pleased look into her lovely eyes as she whirled with his strong arm encircling her waist.

Phillip Raymond had received an invitation to the function, but as yet had not appeared, a fact which was noticed by nearly every one, the host especially wondering at his absence, with more interest than any one, except, perhaps, Constance McDowell.

"Ah, here he is, here he is," cried the well-known voice of Senator Bainbridge, as he ushered Raymond into the midst of the merry throng.

Everybody was more or less interested in him since his narrow escape on the previous evening. Many, too, were the sidelong glances cast in his direction by maneuvering mammas who had marriageable daughters whose charms were fast fading. They had heard exaggerated stories of the transformation of

the Flint Plantation, and in moments of castle building were wont to picture a loved daughter presiding mistress of that famous place. Thus it was that Phillip Raymond was the object of all eyes.

Mantie waved her white hand in welcome, as he engaged Lucille Bainbridge in conversation. Judge Walker perceiving him, greeted him warmly, as he called him from where he was watching the waltzers, to a place beside himself and Mrs. Walker who were conversing with Constance. He introduced him to his wife with the remark: "I think you have met Mrs. McDowell!" Constance smiled, as Raymond bowed low over her extended hand, saying, "I have had the pleasant privilege of meeting Mrs. McDowell frequently!"

Seats were found for the quartette in a little alcove, where they could see the ball-room and still be secluded. "Heavens!" thought Raymond, "is it fate which brings me in contact with the woman I love at every turn?"

The conversation was carried on in somewhat perfunctory manner until it turned to the condition of affairs existing in the Territory. The Judge, being a man of great intelligence, was well versed in recent legislation, both National, and Territorial. The Bill which was to create the Commission was at that time occupying the attention of the people whose eyes were fastened upon the fertile valleys of the Nation, and whose greedy sons were even then whet-

ting their appetites for great slices of the rich alluvial soil which had for years been the home of the Red man.

"The condition of the people is better than at any previous time, and I cannot see why we are not let alone," said the Judge, with some acrimony. Then continued: "There is no telling what the rulings of the Department of the Interior will do for us in the end. I have no doubt that the consummation of tribal relation is near, and it fills my heart with sorrow for my brethren when I think of the future. They will become the unsuspecting prey of sharks from every clime, and soon become a people without a country.

"Yes, so it seems," answered Raymond. "Still, would not the condition of the Territory be bettered if admitted as a state? Another Star on the old Flag would be a splendid addition to the constellation already there! More so, could it not be placed there with National honor and not to further political ends, as has been done in some cases!"

"Well, as to that, I should think in some ways it would be for the betterment of a part; yet, on the other hand, it would be sounding the death knell of thousands of my countrymen. Rum, that curse of nations, you know, would be admitted as one of the adjuncts of civilization, and then—heavens, man! look at the condition of affairs even now. Think of that poor soul who languishes behind prison bars.

to-night, and picture what the conditions would be should the sale of spirituous liquors become legalized as it is in Missouri and Arkansas—in fact, in almost every state.”

“Really, my friend, I had not thought of the situation from that point, although is not the end inevitable? Will not congress do all it can to pave the way for throwing your country open to settlement? Already there are rumors that your lands are to be allotted, and, I am told, all efforts made in that direction are bitterly opposed by some of the Cherokees as well as nearly all the Creeks.”

“Well, yes,” said the Judge, “there has been some resistance; though only in a disorganized way, and that by a few malcontents who would make bad matters worse; but I hear the authorities have about quelled them, and there is not the slightest apprehension felt from that source.”

“I fear it was an unwise move on the part of the Government, when the troops were removed from the Garrison and the Fort disbanded.”

“I think so too, and have for the last ten years. Still, on the other hand, there was nothing for them to do. All the trouble along the border has receded westward. The renegades have followed the tide of civilization towards the Rockies; and the five tribes can boast of more advancement than can be found in many of the old states, I’m sure. Why, look at Kentucky.”

"True; yet I think your people should try every method known to preserve the Post in all its originality, since there are many historical incidents connected with it." Then turning to Constance, he said:

"I think the American people the most sacrilegious, from this standpoint, of any on earth. America is called, and justly, the New World; still, national pride is dormant, and should be stimulated to such an extent, that the old border posts be preserved. With our present influx of immigration, there will soon be no new lands and our early traditions will become neglected deplorably."

"I, too, would like to see the Garrison preserved," said the Judge. "About it clings memories most sacred to every citizen of the South. My father has often related in my hearing stories that would become classic literature were they handled in a manner appropriate to their setting."

While this conversation was held between Judge Walker and Phillip Raymond, the ladies were very much interested, adding a word occasionally, to express their approval or otherwise.

"I hear that you are making extensive improvements on the Flint Plantation," said the Judge, abruptly to Raymond, and before Phillip could answer, continued: "I am glad of it too. You are probably aware that our friend, Mrs. McDowell was

born on that place, and that it was the property of my friend Davidson for many, many years."

For a moment Phillip could not answer, then said: "Ah, is that true? I had never heard—yes, let me think—ah, yes, I do remember, Joe Waitie told me at the time I employed him that he used to live there during the lifetime of Mr. Davidson." The evident confusion of Raymond was perceptible, both to the Judge and Mrs. Walker.

Constance grasped the arm of her chair, while her eyes sought the face of the speaker. A coldness of death stole about her heart, for she realized that her suspicions as to the identity of the man calling himself Phillip Raymond, were correct. They only needed confirmation. She was certain Mantie Moses possessed the desired knowledge, and she was determined to know beyond a certainty the truth ere closing her eyes in slumber that night.

Her heart trembled now, that she could study the situation from a vantage point which was never before at her command, and her soul rose up in arms against him. Yet she would not betray the knowledge she believed she had already gained. She would rather die than permit him to know that she ever gave one thought to the past.

Presently the Judge arose, asking the ladies to excuse him as there were matters of importance to be attended to before the hour of convening court the next morning.

"I shall go with you," said Mrs. Walker, and she too left her chair, leaving Constance and Phillip alone.

An awkward pause ensued. Finally, Phillip said: "Mrs. McDowell, what do you think of the outcome in the Elmore case, judging from what you have heard of the testimony?" Raymond spoke in a strained voice, and with effort.

"There appears to be little hope for him," she replied in low tones.

"Yes, the evidence against him is very strong, yet I am convinced that he is innocent, and it would be a travesty on Justice should he be convicted."

"I know very little of courts, and it is out of mere courtesy to Miss Bainbridge, and a sympathy for Mrs. Elmore, who is an old acquaintance, that I have heard so much of the case," answered Constance, who hoped to cut the conversation short. Raymond was embarrassed, and did not speak again until Mantie came running up, saying:

"Oh, why don't you dance? I do believe you both are pious people. It is splendid! Come and enjoy the next number any way."

"Will you dance with an old man like me, Mantie?" asked Raymond.

"I would, were it not that you already have a partner," said the young lady, with a toss of her pretty head as she glanced mischievously at Constance.

Constance was confused, but with a chilly smile, remarked: "I suppose we will have to dance, if you insist."

"Well, I insist, most emphatically," replied Mantie, as she was claimed by her partner, and went whirling around the room like some gauzy-winged butterfly.

"It has been some years since I danced," said Raymond to his companion, "but to-night, I believe I could enjoy the pleasure as well as of yore."

There was nothing for Constance to do, and they left their secluded corner, and joined the waltzers. Phillip Raymond was like a man in a dream; his vision was blurred; his mind in a tumult. A wild thrill went through him, his breath came and went hurriedly, as he clasped her tenderly to his side, and glided around the room.

Constance felt his arm tremble, and for the moment became forgetful of her surroundings. She would live a few blissful moments, as bidden by her heart, which grew lighter and lighter. Many eyes followed them as the dance continued, and many comments were made, as the two seemed oblivious to all. Mantie was elated over the success of her ruse, and her eyes shone with animation.

"Oh, how I do wish they would understand each other and let that horrid past bury itself," she ejaculated, so loudly as to attract the attention of Milo Canfield, who looked at her curiously.

When the dance was finished, Raymond led his

partner to a seat, and sat by her. Mantie went skipping by, pausing long enough to say: "Thank you, ever so much!"

Very little was said, and Raymond soon arose to take his leave, holding out his hand. "Mrs. McDowell, I hope you have enjoyed the evening, and have no regrets."

"None whatever, Mr. Raymond," emphasizing the name with a peculiar intonation.

He bowed low over her hand, and disappeared through the doorway. Constance watched him until he was gone, then with a smothered cry covered her face with her hands, while tears filtered through her fingers and fell upon the roses fastened to her bodice.

CHAPTER XXXIII

WHEN Bart Nelson left his band of cut-throats on the head waters of the Rattlesnake, bidding them meet him in the hills skirting the banks of the Deep Fork, miles away to the westward, he turned his face in the direction of the Fourteen Mile.

All day he rode, and at night found himself at the cabin of one of the renegades who made it a practise to furnish the interior with whisky, brought into the Territory despite the vigilance of the officials, yet, who, in some instances, connived with these peddlers, offering them impunity from arrest if they would divide their ill-gotten profits. The decoction furnished by these men was deadly, and once a man imbibed freely, his reasoning became maniacal.

From this man Nelson learned that the trial of Thomas Elmore was in progress at Greenleaf Courthouse, and that Phillip Raymond was engaged as counsel, with Senator Bainbridge, to defend him. Bart knew that he would find no trouble in escaping notice, as all the countryside had gone to the trial, and, at the time, was not looking for him.

He reasoned that most all the deputies and Indian Police would be summoned to the court, and consequently became much bolder in his movements, so much so, that he rode into a little town on his way and secured a supply of ammunition and other necessities conducive to his comfort. He had little fear any way, for at this period in the history of the Territory, the law-abiding class was held in mortal terror by the various bands of banditti; nor could they be censured for furnishing "aid and comfort to the enemy," as the situation was characterized by a citizen of repute. Having made everything to his satisfaction, Nelson resumed his journey southward, and at the end of the second day found himself in the Green Hills overlooking the Arkansas river, whose surface was visible for miles.

Secreting his horse in a dense thicket, far out in an unfrequented place, he sat down on a felled tree and waited with the patience peculiar to his race for the coming darkness, which was near, as the shadows were lengthening. His face was clouded, and he started at the slightest noise, while his hands involuntarily sought his arms as his fingers twitched with apprehension.

"This cannot last," he muttered in a thick voice, as his lips were set, with an effort to repress a sigh. For a time he silently contemplated the past. He reviewed the lost years with a frown upon his handsome face. His infatuation for the beautiful Con-

stance Davidson had proved his curse, and his black eyes gleamed as they gazed at the valley below.

There was his enemy who should reap the whirlwind, then he would go to the distant West, and begin life anew. It mattered little to him what might follow could he only see Jack Brainard lying dead at his feet. If necessary, he would willingly pay the full demands of justice.

As twilight deepened, he continued thinking, planning, and revelling in savage thoughts showered upon the unsuspecting head of the man he hated. Fireflies lighted the gloom with their feeble glow; catbirds twittered strangely at the unwonted intrusion of their domain while fluttering their wings angrily. The chipmunk barked in a shrill voice, and the crickets chirped in their leafy retreats, as Bart Nelson stole stealthily down the hill in the direction of the lights that twinkled about the home of the Judge.

Shaping his course and moving like a spirit of evil, he sped from tree to tree, from shrub to shrub, until he reached a point several hundred yards north of where he knew the home of the Judge to be. Suddenly the sound of voices reached him, and creeping some paces ahead, he espied the forms of Mantie Moses and Milo Canfield as they walked aimlessly through the trees, laughing and chatting, utterly oblivious to their surroundings. As they passed his hiding-place, Nelson changed position and awaited further developments. He was reconnoitering, and determined not

to be balked in his endeavor to rid himself of the man he hated so bitterly.

Looking ahead, he saw Constance McDowell and Phillip Raymond advancing in his direction; and the hot blood surged through his veins, changing him into a beast that thirsted for the blood of Jack Brainard. The gleam of a demon glittered in his eyes as he watched with bated breath the approach of the unsuspecting couple. In his hands he held a rifle, his fingers playing nervously with the trigger. He lifted it to his shoulder and glanced along the glistening barrel. The gloom made his aim uncertain, so he waited until they drew nearer, then—"Ha, ha!" he chuckled fiendishly, and again he laughed, a low cruel laugh.

Constance paused. They had gone far into the wood. Nelson saw them turn, and with the swiftness of death, lifted his gun to his face, a flame of fire lighted the scene. Again and again the weapon belched fire; the echoes rang in the wood, as with a smothered exclamation of exultation he disappeared among the trees, thinking that at last he had brought the vendetta to an end.

Creeping through the undergrowth with the subtle movement of a viper, Nelson secured his horse and made his way up to the crest of the mountain, and was soon plunging down a ravine on the other side.

Reaching the plain, he turned his horse's head in the direction of the Grand, intending to cross that

stream and make his way to the banks of the Verdigris. Once there, he would be safe from pursuit, and would have ample time to reach the waters of the Deep Fork ahead of his men. He knew the bottoms between Choska and the Arkansas were the refuge of numerous "bad men," and felt no apprehension in going there, as there was a freemasonry existing universally among those who lived by preying upon the opulent farmers and express companies. Then it was but two days' ride to Younger's Bend, which at this time was infested with refugees from justice, congregating from all parts of the country, and who have little trouble in finding an asylum among the numerous retreats.

Passing through gaps in the mountains, and skirting the ridges by hidden trails, he made his way to a crossing of the Fourteen Mile near the home of Philip Raymond, and could not resist the temptation to send a few volleys in the direction of the light which glowed in the windows of the mansion.

There was a splintering of glass, accompanied by cries from Chloe and Joe Waitie who were in the hallway, hoping every moment that "Ma'se Phil'd come home."

The miscreant did not pause to note the effect of his shots, but urged his pony on in a swinging gallop, making the fire flash from the flint rocks at every leap. Crossing a range of low hills, he found himself going down the valley of the Grand. Suddenly, his horse

gave a convulsive plunge, and despite the efforts of his rider, leaped over a precipice and went crashing to the earth some distance below, falling upon his rider who swooned with pain and lay as one dead, while a crimson stream trickled slowly through his clothing, staining the sharp rocks beneath him.

How long he lay there he could not tell, but awakened to find some one tugging at the pony, which had been killed by the fall. Nelson groaned, as excruciating pains followed the efforts of his unknown preserver to rescue him. At last, he felt the weight removed, and essayed to lift himself from the ground only to fall back in a faint from which he did not recover for a long while, then to find himself in a strange cabin, with an aged Indian bending over him, applying some bitter cordial to his lips.

For a long while the outlaw lay contemplating his surroundings, watching every movement of the Indian, whom he regarded scrutinizingly.

"Pony slip off bluff; fall on leg, leg break; you hurt bad inside; no can get well. Yellow Plume find and bring to cabin; no let die, if he can help. One sun since bring to cabin. You crazy; evil spirit hold you. Before six suns, go you," said the Indian.

"What is that you say, my friend?"

"No must talk; no must talk; bad medicine," grunted the Indian, as he stood looking down at the broken limb.

Nelson realized that his condition was serious. Deep pains pierced his lungs. Froth laden with blood escaped his lips and tasted as bitter as gall.

Closing his eyes, he lay back among the pile of skins which composed his bed. A hectic flush crept over his face. A dampness of approaching death gathered on his forehead, and he knew that dissolution was near.

"The end, the end," he muttered feebly, as he opened his eyes and gazed vacantly at the swaying trees. A smile of contentment rested upon his face. What mattered it to him, when only an hour or more since he had swept away his enemy, and was therefore ready to pass the portals of the unknown land, which to him was a myth.

Yellow Plume silently gazed at the face of Bart Nelson, while the hooting of an owl struck quaveringly upon his ear.

CHAPTER XXXIV

MILo CANFIELD was the constant companion of Miss Moses during the evening of the dance, much to the chagrin of the other young gallants, who vainly endeavored to supplant him. After the second figure, they had gone out in the moonlight and walked to and fro beneath the trees. Canfield was very earnest, very attentive, and tenderly solicitous of her. Several times he had thought himself equal to the task of telling her of his love, and as many times found that courage oozing away. At last, he said:

"Miss—Miss—" then paused.

"Moses is my name. How forgetful you are!" she said, saucily, as she stopped in front of him and looked up into his flushed face.

"No—that is—I—I—had not quite forgotten, but I want to say something to you, and that is why I brought you out here in the moonlight."

"You dare not! If you do, I'll tell Mr. Raymond."

"Well, you—you see I have made up my mind that you need one other than a guardian to—to—look after you—"

"Well! you are presumptuous, I must say. Now, I don't, for I have Miss Bainbridge, Mrs. McDowell, Uncle Joe, Aunt Chloe, and Mr. Raymond to look after me. What kind of a place is it that you would apply for? I will speak to guardie about it. If he thinks he needs another man on the Plantation, I will ask him to give you the preference."

Canfield was nonplussed, and again went floundering deeper and deeper, by saying: "Can't you see that—"

"No, sir, I can't 'see that'; you will have to be more explicit."

"Well, I love—I want you to—be—"

"Say, don't you think the moonlight b-e-a-u-t-i-f-u-l?" said Mantie with a tantalizing drawl.

"Darn the moon—"

"Goodness, how you shock me! Is that the way you generally speak when in the company of ladies, Mr. Canfield?"

"I say,—t!e moon—has nothing to do with—"

"You are mistaken," said the minx; "my Prof. told me that the moon had all to do with the rise and fall of the tide, and Aunt Chloe tells me, too, that sometimes people get moonstruck; that they lose their minds—go blind, and all that sort of thing. Ugh! that must be horrid!"

"Well, I never in all my life—"

"Do you read poetry?" said Mantie innocently.

"Poetry! Gosh!—all—him—"

"Who wrote that; was it Shakespeare?"

"I mean the boy—"

"No, he didn't! Guardie told me that the boy didn't stand on the burning deck. It must have been a man."

"What the d—"

"No, I don't mean that either."

"Why, do you know that you will drive me—"

"Oh no; the moon has already done that. I shall tell Aunt Chloe just as soon as I get home that she is right, and that the moon has a most terrible effect on some people."

"Will you—"

"No, I think not; not for a while at least."

His perturbation was increasing every moment, and Mantie was eying him to see how far she could carry her harmless persecutions. She had learned to look at Canfield with shy glances, and deep down in her little heart there was a fond feeling alarmingly akin to love for the handsome ranger who was, as she well knew, about to say something which all young ladies desire to hear, especially if uttered by their ideal.

Canfield was persistent, and continued: "I want to know if you could love me! Now you have it, Miss," he said hastily.

Mantie raised her brows in seeming amazement, saying: "Well! Is that what you have been trying to say all this time? Do you mean me?"

"Yes!" he answered eagerly, as he advanced a step, his eyes sparkling.

"Don't you think you have made a mistake? Was it not some other lady whom you intended to say this to?"

"No, no! Heaven, no!" replied Canfield. "There can never be but one to me, and that is yourself."

"Dear me! I—I—well—I don't know whether to—to—say—y-e-s— or, I don't know what to do!"

"Then say yes, darling! and trust me to love you until my dying day!"

"Are you sure you will do that?"

"Yes, doubly sure! I have loved you every day since the day I rode away from Phillip Raymond's. Don't you remember? the day I waved my hat to you and I saw your sweet face looking at me from the upstairs window. Yes, every moment, since that time, has your image been engraven on my heart, and there it will remain until the sands of time meted out to me have run their course."

"Now, are you sure of all this? You promise to buy me bon-bons, sweetmeats, and candy, and lots of things if I say yes?" she said sweetly.

"Yes, anything, everything, all things!"

"And you'll get me a—gun—too!"

"Bless you, yes! and teach you to use it!"

"And let me shoot at you when you get mean and do naughty things! You see, I want to be one of

the new women, and do things just like a man. See!"

"Yes, I see," said Canfield, much amused.

"Well, then, if you agree, I suppose I might as well—no, no! I haven't said it yet," she exclaimed, as Canfield came still nearer, with arms outstretched, causing her to retreat farther back into the shadows.

"I said," she whispered, "that I might as well say y-e-s! Now, then," and her pouting lips were turned to receive a kiss from Canfield.

Oh, how happy! How light was her heart, as she listened to her lover's soft tones there in the moonlight. A new thrill took possession of her being, and she walked on winged feet as she sped away to her room at the close of the dance, her face aglow with a new-born radiance.

Constance was waiting for her, and as the young girl burst in impetuously, her eyes glowing like stars, the secret told itself ere Mantie opened her lips. Constance was glad for her friend, although in her own famished heart there was a deep pang.

"I am so glad for you, Mantie!" she said, in a voice which trembled with emotion as she threw her arms about the girl who rested her head upon Constance's shoulder.

Mantie was touched at the loneliness expressed by this act of Constance, and drawing her face down, kissed it passionately, while their tears mingled together. Mantie wept because she was both happy and

sorrowful; Constance, because there was an aching void in her life that could never be filled.

Seating themselves, they clasped hands and looked out at the silvery moonlight in silence. To-morrow, they would hear the end of Elmore's trial, then return to their homes. Mantie would willingly go now were it not that she had promised Lucille to hear the closing speech in the case of murder. Yes, she wanted to be alone so she could dream over the sweetness of the new love which had come into her life. And she was also impatient to tell her friends in the West the good fortune which was hers.

Outside, the moon poured forth a flood of glory over the landscape. Suddenly, Mantie saw a form moving to and fro beneath the trees, and as the pedestrian turned, she recognized her guardian. Constance perceived him also, and she clasped Mantie's hand convulsively, as a sob shook her from head to foot. Mantie pressed her hand tenderly.

"What is it, Constance, dear? Tell me! Oh, my friend, let me at least sympathize with you in your hour of sadness!"

Constance, touched by Mantie's loving words, and gentle solicitude, said:

"Mantie, you know, you must have known, at the time you persuaded me to tell you my life's history, that Jack Brainard and Phillip Raymond is one and the same person. Why you should have urged me so persistently to relate that cruel story is more than I

can conceive. I did not dream of his identity when I told you. Ah, heavens! How I wish I had died ere this; that I had died long ago at a time when his face would have been enshrined in my heart; when I could have looked down from my home above, and, as his guardian angel, watched over him. But now—Oh, Mantie, Mantie! Now, it is all so different! I cannot love—misery has consumed his image, and in my heart there is a charred altar where once an idol reigned supreme!”

“Constance, dear friend! do not talk in that hopeless way; it pains me more than you can tell. Do not imagine for a moment that I would obtrusively try to act as a mediator between you and my guardian. Yet, could you have seen what I have during the time I have been in his home, you would not wonder why I was so anxious to know the story of Phillip Raymond, whose true identity was made known to me through a picture which hangs in the library, with its face turned to the wall, that the curious may not profane its sacredness by gazing upon it. One day when by myself, Mr. Raymond having gone to some distant part of the Plantation, I could not resist the temptation to examine the picture. It was wrong, I know, but when I turned it, I looked into *your* eyes, dear Constance.

“For many days, I pondered over the matter; and at last duped Aunt Chloe into revealing something. Putting two and two together I reached a true solu-

tion of the problem. He does not know—does not dream that I am aware his real name is Brainard. Ah, Constance, frequently have I surprised him and found him gazing at your picture, his very soul in his eyes, and a sad, hopeless smile on his lips, as he turned away.”

“Hush, Mantie, hush! Oh, heaven! Mantie, do not wring my soul with such a revelation. I cannot stand it. Human nature is weak at the best, and I have endured so much—so much,” almost wailed Constance, as she wrung her hands in agony. “Why, oh, why, could I not live on, thinking that he slept calmly in the distant hills of the West? Why must my heart be wrenched so cruelly, when other trials weigh so heavily?”

Then in a despairing voice, she whispered, “Jack, Jack! why were you not true?” and burying her face on Mantie’s shoulder, burst into a flood of tears.

Mantie’s heart was overflowing with the joy of a new-born love, while Constance’s was breaking. Was it just? Yet, did she dare question the wisdom of the Ruler of the Universe? No, no! God was good, and His hand directs all things! Has He not said: “What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.”

When Constance looked out again, Raymond had disappeared, and the forest seemed deserted.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE second morning of Elmore's trial dawned bright and clear. Not a cloud obscured the skies. Nature sang with myriad tongues, as the scene about the court-house was presented to those who waited impatiently for the last act of the drama.

At nine o'clock the Judge occupied his seat. The Sheriff, Jury, the tailsmen, the guards, and the prisoner were all present. The room was again crowded to its utmost capacity. Constance, Mantie, and Lucille Bainbridge were among the first to assemble, and waited anxiously for the hour of opening.

Constance's face was unusually pale, and a heavy look was visible about her eyes, denoting the loss of sleep. Mantie was awed by the change on the face of the Judge, which now was cold and metallic. Thomas Elmore looked wretched and haggard, while a look of hopeless despair shadowed his eyes. All night he had kept his lonely vigil, standing at the grated window looking at the stars and listening to the chirp of the woodland. To sleep was impossible.

A slight murmur was heard from those assembled near the entrance. The crowd swayed, and Phillip

Raymond walked slowly down the aisle and entered the Bar. His face was paler than Mantie had ever seen it. Dressed faultlessly, with white tie and clerical coat, he towered head and shoulders above all the others. Erect, with set lips, he moved to his station near his partner in the defense. A peculiar light shone in his eyes and a determined expression rested on his compressed lips.

Court was opened. The Clerk called the Jury one by one, and they were polled as they answered. The Judge called the civil docket as a matter of form, and also to give the attorneys time to get ready any new motions which they might have in view, while the Elmore case was being closed.

The Judge motioned the junior counsel for the defense to proceed, and Phillip Raymond arose to address the assemblage. Leisurely he gazed at the sea of uplifted faces. He glanced at Mantie, whose beautiful eyes beamed with confidence, then he glanced briefly at Constance McDowell. She met his gaze steadily, not a shadow of a smile to encourage him in the coming ordeal. He did not look longer, but drew up his shoulders and was ready to plead the cause of two instead of one. His task was Herculean, his only hope was, that strength might be given him from on High. Slowly he raised his arm and pointed at the bowed form of his client. Not a word, not a sound fell from his lips. Instinctively the eyes of all followed his index finger, and rested there. A

stifling suspense seemed to seize every heart; the court-room became rigid as one man, and breathed in low gasps. What power was this which held that vast throng? They could only look at Phillip Raymond. For two whole moments he held them thus. At last he said:

"Who art thou, oh man, that thou dare condemn a fellow-man?" Then his eyes flashed. The fire of battle royal came into them, and he launched forth in a volume of eloquence which captured his listeners—chained them, as it were. He swayed them at his will, and as his voice rang out in trumpet-tones they became dazed. Turning to the Jury, he continued:

"Gentlemen of the Jury, one of your young men sits in the prisoner's dock, charged with having taken a human life; charged with having violated the peace and dignity of your beautiful land; charged with having wantonly destroyed that which no man can restore. By the side of that young man sits the bowed form of an aged mother whose face is turned heavenward, while her bleeding heart is at the foot of Minerva's altar, crying for mercy!

"An All-Wise God looks down from yonder dome, and stands pledged to guide the bark of true conscience through the stormy waves of indecision. He is at the helm, and demands justice! The bowed form of that aged mother demands justice! The life and liberty of my client demand justice! The voice

of conscience is knocking at the door of your hearts and demands justice! Thank God, your country echoes the cry.

"Peers of your country, weigh well the evidence in this cause. Be not derelict in your duty to your God, to your Nation, to this sorrowful mother, to your own hearth-stones! My friend demands of you a verdict, consigning Thomas Elmore to a felon's death. He has done his duty, like a brave soldier, as it is interpreted by him, yet he reckons merely from—shall we say, circumstantial evidence, that most illusory of all testimony, and not from the standpoint of conscience, justice, and mercy!

"Blood has been shed; a life has been blighted; a home has been desolated; children made orphans; hearts have been wrung with sorrow, declares my worthy opponent. True—too true! yet, could it be conclusively proven that the hand of Thomas Elmore, and not that of another laid low this life, were these hearts made sorrowful by the wanton act of Thomas Elmore? In heaven's name, answer! but do not answer until you have weighed well the demands of true justice, and hearkened well to its cries which, deep down in your souls, struggles to find utterance! You dare not stain your escutcheons of honor by stifling these cries. Be not false to the principles of truth and honesty!

"Gentlemen, there is not one of you who does not know that it was the hydra-headed monster Rum that

stilled the life which Thomas Elmore is accused of taking. Rum, rum! the blight of nations, the corroding curse of mankind!"

He lifted his eyes heavenward, as if addressing an invisible being. He carried the breathless throng upon the wings of self-forgetfulness. He recited the story of his own life in veiled words, words meant only for the ears of the white-faced woman who sat with clinched hands and rigid form. In accents of pathos he poured out the long hopeless struggle he had made against the demon that had robbed him of reason and driven him to the dark regions of hell, and left him there to revel with the goblin of remorse which, whether he were sleeping or waking, haunted him continually.

As the recital was continued, many of his hearers arose from their seats. His thought was their thought; his will their will, and therefore to them Thomas Elmore became an innocent man. At last, he returned from his flight ethereal, and sought the level of his fellow-creatures. For the first time in all those long weary years he had unburdened his soul in the presence of Constance McDowell, who sat as one stunned. She, of all that assemblage, could define the earnestness of his plea. Deep down in her heart there was a small voice which pleaded passionately for Phillip Raymond, only to be stilled by the cruel hand of Pride. She would not—she could not

forget, and her eyes grew sad as she gazed calmly at him.

When he took his seat, there was a hush in the court-room. The Senator sat with his hands resting beneath his chin, and a tear trickled through his trembling fingers. The Attorney for the District looked out of the window with humid eyes; many were weeping softly, and as the Judge instructed the Jury, his voice trembled:

Slowly the twelve men left the court-room. They went to deliberate over the verdict. Those men, tall, straight, with swarthy faces and raven locks, the bulwark of their nation, were silent. They were wrestling with conscience, for they desired to be true to humanity, true to their God.

Mantie looked in amazement at the face of Raymond, which seemed to glow with the light of inspiration. He was looking out at the swaying branches. A load had been lifted from his soul, and his task was finished. He had spoken, and one woman knew he was, for the time being, living in the castle which he had builded years ago. Once more she sat beside him in the little white church beneath the elms, and he was glad, glad again. A scant fifteen minutes had dragged out their length, when the announcement came:

"The Jury is ready to report, your Honor."

"Bring them in," said the Judge.

Slowly the men filed into their places. Thomas

Elmore braced himself to receive the shock. His mother's arms crept about his shoulders. Constance sat dazed, while Mantie clutched her bosom as if to ward off a blow. Suspense, interminable, dread suspense seemed to have possession of all present.

"Gentlemen, have you arrived at a verdict?"

"We have, your Honor."

"Read the verdict, Mr. Foreman."

Oh, horrors! How long! Would he never read? A maniacal longing seemed to hold the assembly, and every one shuddered. Could it be? No, no! cried the hearts of all.

"We, the Jury, find the defendant," read the Foreman,—months, years, ages,—heavens! was he dumb—would he never complete that awful sentence—"Not guilty!"

The words were low and scarcely audible. The speech of Phillip Raymond had won, and Thomas Elmore would live, would be set free.

When the verdict of the Jury was grasped in its true meaning, a suppressed murmur was heard among the waiting throng, but they remained seated as if there was something still for which to wait. Phillip Raymond was the first to leave the room, which to him seemed stifling. As he walked down the aisle, he bowed to Mantie and Constance, and when they left, they saw him again, leaning wearily against the trunk of an old oak tree, looking toward the west.

When the crowd left the court-room, Elmore's

friends gathered around and took Raymond's hand. Their words were few, but filled with gratitude, which was food to his hungering heart.

Mantie rushed up to him and clasped his hand, while the tears streamed down her face. Constance passed without so much as looking in his direction. This act caused the slightest pang of resentment to rise in Mantie's heart; for the young girl was now thoroughly acquainted with the man whom she had been taught to call Phillip Raymond, and it hurt her sensitive soul to see him slighted by any one, especially by Constance. But she knew little of human nature, or she would have discovered that oftentimes the coldest actions conceal the deepest love. Over the burning volcano there is frequently a bank of snow.

Fortunately for Raymond, he did not perceive the slight. He was oblivious to most that was passing around him. Senator Bainbridge and Judge Walker were loud in their praise of his effort. Although the circumstances connected with the case appeared to afford conclusive evidence against Elmore, there were extenuating points which, by the skilful dealing of Raymond, had been construed in favor of the defendant. Conflicting stories coming from the witnesses had been utilized by the junior counsel, and this, together with his magnetic oratory, had led the Jury to render a verdict in favor of the defendant.

At noon, most of the witnesses and visitors were ready to depart for their respective homes. Convey-

ances of all kinds were speeding in every direction, bearing those who were anxious to spread the news of Tommy Elmore's good luck, as they termed the verdict of the Jury. Constance, Lucille, and Mantie, in their light phaeton, were threading the mountain roads leading to the Garrison. Phillip Raymond mounted his horse, and with the commendatory words of Senator Bainbridge and Judge Walker ringing in his ears, rode away to the north, followed by the blessing of Mrs. Elmore, who was proud and happy as she walked away leaning upon the arm of her son.

Court adjourned until the following day, and there being no session that afternoon, there was time to talk over the details of the case just ended. The Senator was proud of the finding of the Jury, and strutting about with expanded chest, talked volubly of his assistant counsel, Phillip Raymond.

"It was a masterful speech," said he. "Never in all my life have I heard a better! I'd be glad could I form a partnership with such a man, for he is well-read, eloquent, and chock-full of the material that goes to make a first-class lawyer."

"Yes," assented the Judge; "but, Senator, I fear you will never realize your desire. There appears to be something about him that does not invite close acquaintance; something that smacks of disappointment, unrest, and weariness. Why darn me, if I could look him in the eyes to save me!" Then the good man whispered behind his hand: "Thundera-

tion! he didn't have eyes for any one but that little white-faced girl of Sam Davidson's, Constance McDowell! I glanced at him once or twice last night at the dance, and could not avoid seeing that there was something wrong. And she was in a kettle of fish, too, for about the time the dance was over, Miranda found her drying her eyes in the back parlor. By gings, it is curious! Yes, very curious!" muttered the gentleman, as he left his friends.

That evening a number of the officials were gathered about the steps of the court-house, discussing the political status of the day.

"Gentlemen," said the Judge, "if we had more men like our friend Raymond, there would not be so much useless legislation. It is disgusting to look back over the past few years and see what has been accomplished for the detriment of our country. One ruling after another has followed until there is no telling what will come next. Our tribal relations are nearing an end, and in a few more years our customs will have become legends. I had hoped to see my people left in peace and protected from the encroachments of those who would despoil and cut us adrift; still I cannot say that such will be the case.

"Last night, when Raymond and I were talking, he advanced some very clever ideas as to the way he thought this country should be governed, and I could see quite plainly that he was not one of those who would rob us of what little we have left. Then an-

other thing he mentioned, was the preservation of the old Garrison in its original state, as far as possible."

"The very thing!" said the Senator. "Why dum me, sir, I have thought of that for the last ten years, but thought it useless to speak of the matter. Yes, sir, the very thing! the very thing!"

"That is my way of looking at the situation, too, gentleman," said the Prosecuting Attorney.

"Zounds, yes! Why, it is enough to cause Chief Johnnycake and General Sam Houston to turn in their graves to think of the total obliteration of the old place. It is beyond doubt one of the most romantic spots that exists to-day anywhere in the West. It would teach our children to reverence such qualities as existed in the pioneers of this country. Why, could the walls of the building that General Scott used for headquarters speak, they would reveal plans which gave to the United States an empire. Think of it, gentlemen! The old building which once in its history has sheltered such men as Generals Lee, Taylor, Scott, McClelland, and others, should come down as a heritage for our sons and daughters. This is where the countries of the Old World have the advantage of us. They preserve and reverence their old historic piles of architecture.

"Then, too, there was the troth plighted, which gave to the Southern hero, his wife, the amiable Sarah Knox Taylor. Yes, now is the time to go to work and

do what we can to undo some things, before it is forever too late."

"Well," said the Senator, "I shall look into the matter at once and see what can be done in the way of perfecting some organization which will assist in realizing the sentiments expressed." With this, he walked away. Soon the crowd followed, and silence reigned about the old court-house.

CHAPTER XXXVI

PHILLIP RAYMOND reached home late in the evening, and was greeted with delight by Joe, who sat in the door of his cabin looking down the road while strumming a dreamy air on his banjo, Chloe keeping time by crooning over her work in the kitchen.

As Phillip entered the room, she dropped a courtesy, and said: "Ebenin', Ma'se Phillip! Yo' doan kno' jes' how glad Chloe is t' hab yo' home onct mo'! P'eah's lak et's be'n mo'n a mont since yo' went t' de co't!"

"Thank you, Chloe! It makes me feel good to know some one is glad to see me," answered Raymond.

"Law's honey, yo' am allus in de min' ob Chloe an' Joey, too; kaze ef yo' war not on de Fo'teen Mile, we cudd'n' stay dah a'tall."

"Well, Chloe, what has been going on since I went away?"

"Nuffin much, sah, 'ceptin' dat dar wah some dirty skunk shoot fro de do' de oddah night, an' mos' scar' me t' deff!"

"Is that so?" said Phillip, as his mind reverted to the attempt on his life while at the court-house.

"Et am so, an' ebbah since den, we doan hab no light in de house aftah de sun go down, sah."

"A good idea, no doubt, Chloe; when there are so many questionable characters prowling around."

"Yaa, et am de bes' idee I kin t'ink ob on de present 'casion."

"Oh, well, Miss Mantie will be home to-morrow, and then the old place will be more pleasant."

"Ma'ne Phil, dat am de beat'nes' li'l' gearl dat ebbah I see. She am des de sweetes' sof'-heartedes' chile in de whole worl'. All de time she sing an' play on de pianner, an'," she concluded somewhat dubiously, "she play de mos' 'moosin' pranks on dat ol' man ob mine! Oh, golly! et am mo' dan I c'n stan'."

"How about Chloe? Doesn't she amuse you sometimes with pranks on yourself, as well?" asked Philip, remembering when Chloe thought she would die from the sting of the centipede.

"Huh! dat war nuffin'! Chloe jes' kno' how t' tek de young Missus, an' she doan pay no 'tention to de way she do roun' heah. Now, yoah suppah am ready, Ma'ne Phil," said Chloe, as she poured a cup of tea for him in a manner which indicated that she did not relish the turn he had given to the conversation.

After disposing of his meal, Raymond went to his room and seated himself at his work-table, and began the task of looking over a mass of correspondence which had accumulated during his absence. There

was a letter from Warren, which brought a frown to his face, and grasping a pen, he wrote until far into the night. Page after page was scratched off in a bold rapid hand, which, when completed, he sealed securely, and placed in a hidden compartment of his desk.

The morning star was shining brightly as Raymond stepped to the window and gazed down the valley. Something stirred the leaves on a clump of bushes a short distance from the house, and Yellow Plume stepped into view. The sudden apparition of the Indian startled Raymond, and his nerves tingled with undefined dread, as his hand sought a rifle standing near.

The Indian, noting his action, said in a low guttural voice: "Ha, the pale face is a squaw! He trembles at Yellow Plume, who comes from the hills."

"Are you sure you are alone?" asked Raymond, still at a loss as to the intentions of the other.

"Yellow Plume speaks with a tongue like an arrow," answered the old man, as he stepped into the room, and gazed at the embellished walls. Raymond offered him a chair, saying:

"Then, Yellow Plume is welcome!" The proffered seat was refused with a lofty wave of the hand, as Yellow Plume continued:

"Pale face, the Yellow Plume comes to talk; then he will go back to the hills where the voice of Kiswee calls, back to the cabin where the songs of his other

heart make music sweeter than that of the birds, and there he will sit, but not in the wigwam of the pale face."

The aged Indian looked weird standing there in the mellow light, his long straight hair streaming in waves down his shoulders, and his piercing eyes glittering like those of a basilisk. His blanket was drawn in loose folds about him and knotted at his chest; and his moccasins gave forth no sound as he moved to the center of the room and stood opposite the table at which Raymond was seated.

"Yes," continued the Indian; "there Yellow Plume will watch and wait until Kiswee calls from the sweet smelling forest of the Happy Hunting Grounds, and then he will go to her." He paused, as if to weigh his next words.

"Pale face, last sleep when the moon was straight with the sycamore, Yellow Plume sat alone in his home. A wail came from the mountainside; again and again it came in at the open door, and Yellow Plume go out in the night. Out there he found one of his race. The Yellow Plume takes him to his cabin and try to call him back with the medicine of the forest, but the hand of Manitou was against him. For two sleeps he wandered about the edge of the hunting-grounds and talk with the evil spirit, then he speak and say: 'Let Yellow Plume go to the painted wigwam of the pale face who lives in the valley of the Fourteen Mile, and see if the Good Spirit charmed

the bullet of Bart Nelson who is his enemy; see if he is yet shielded by the hands of the great Manitou; see if he lives yet, and if he does, say to the pale face, that the evil spirit set his hand upon Bart Nelson and saved him, that he might go to the home of the Singing Bird, and with his love bring back the roses to her cheeks. The Singing Bird is a daughter of our people, yet the blood of the pale face runs in her veins; she could not love me because my skin was red, and she spurned me. Tell him that this is the end, and that Bart Nelson has gone to the Happy Hunting-Grounds of his father. Say that as the damp of death settled upon his brow, and before the Great Spirit took the light from his eyes, that he wept for the Singing Bird, and sent this token to be delivered by his own hand before the evening of the sixth sun.' I have done," said Yellow Plume, as he drew from his breast a small, oblong package, and laid it on the table.

At this early hour, nothing could be heard but the tick, tick of the little clock on the mantel. Yellow Plume moved swiftly across the room and disappeared, leaving Raymond gazing at his retreating form, which was soon lost in the shadows.

CHAPTER XXXVII

FOUR days had passed since the visit of Yellow Plume to the home of Phillip Raymond. It was evening, and the drowsy hum of the woodland had settled about the dwelling in the valley of the Fourteen Mile.

Mantie was slowly pulling on her gloves, while her guardian held the gate open for her. They were going to the Garrison. Some strange, impelling force seemed to drive him in that direction, and in his inner pocket, securely folded away, was the package given him by Yellow Plume. For a day or two after the visit of the Indian, the mind of Raymond was in a tumult. The circumstances connected with the situation filled him with an irresistible desire to see Constance McDowell, which at last decided him to go in person rather than send the message by even so trusty a personage as Joe.

As Mantie and her guardian drove slowly along beneath the trees over the well-remembered roads and by so many trysting-places, the mind of Raymond wandered over all the dreary interval which had elapsed since he first left the valley to become a

voluntary exile. Mantie looked dreamily at the crimson rays of the sun as they played with the masses of hazy clouds in the West. Soon the carriage left the wood, and in the distance, the spires of the Garrison became visible. Columns of blue smoke were wafted high in the heavens to melt into nothingness.

Away to the south, the baying of the hunter's hounds could be heard, coupled with the report of rifles, while the broad surface of the Arkansas glimmered as it wound its way through emerald-fringed banks. Reaching an eminence, Raymond stopped. He was trying to picture the scene as it was when the land was young, and when "Coloneh, the Rover," fresh from the sorrows of far-off Tennessee, cast his lot among the primitive Red Men and sought refuge in the wigwam of Oolootetka, the Indian chieftain. Unlike the former, there was not one left to clasp him in his arms and say:

"My son! Eleven winters have passed since we met. My heart has often wandered where you were; and I heard you were a great Chief among your people. Since we met at the Falls, as you went up the river, I have heard that a dark cloud had fallen on the white path wherein you were walking, and when it fell, your thoughts turned to my wigwam and you came to rest with us."

He could see with his mind's eye, the willowy form of the lovely Talihina, as she greeted the sad-eyed

man of the East, who had come among her people, the love-light shining in her black luminous eyes. The form of Texas' liberator appeared in Raymond's vision, as he wandered with him through the tangled forest, and went with him on his excursions to hunt in the valley of the Grand, or along the banks of the sluggish Verdigris. He saw himself following in the wake of that wild unbroken spirit who had left the confines of civilization and sought the solitude of the forest, there to dream of the future, and become the adviser and friend of the Red Man.

Then his mind flew to the grave of the Indian maiden, who sleeps the last long sleep, lulled to rest by the murmuring waves of the Arkansas. Now the scene is changed. Where the liberator had trod in the tangled forest, wave fields of luxuriant grain and snowy cotton. Away to the West, where the buffalo and antelope sported, and the Osage hunters fought to the death with the wily Pawnee, can be heard the shrill blast of the engineer's whistle, as he thunders along over bands of steel.

Cathedral spires rear their tapering lengths along the line of progress, and before many years shall have passed, memory will usurp history. Legends will be related, and coming ages will be powerless to rob the border of its olden charm, which shall grow brighter with each decade, and which is destined to become the imperishable legacy of a nation. For a long, long time, Raymond gazed at the scene which

stretched like a mammoth panorama, until the distant edge of the landscape kissed the skies, and the shadows lengthened in the eastern hills.

Mantie, too, was impressed with the sublimity of the surroundings, and was sad when the spell was broken by her guardian, who gently urged the horses down the hill. Shortly they arrived at the entrance of the Elms and were driving up the graveled walk. Constance and Mrs. Davidson were sitting on the piazza. Little Hal scampered about the lawn with Prince, and his shouts of glee were music to the ears of his mother and grandmother. Seeing the approaching visitors, Constance arose from her seat and walked to the foot of the veranda steps to meet them, as she called Cæsar to come and take charge of the horses.

Although her face was a study, she welcomed her guests cordially, and said to Mantie: "How did you happen to think of bestowing such an unlooked-for pleasure as a visit to us on this delightful evening?"

"Oh, guardie had some matters to look after, so I decided to accompany him. And it was a lovely drive, too! Up yonder on the hill we stopped, and as the sun sank behind the clouds, it was the most beautiful sight I ever beheld. No wonder you people are proud of your marvelous land! The distant Mission made a black patch upon the horizon, while the lights in Muscogee gleamed and twinkled through

the soft haze like balls of molten gold. As I looked away over the low valley of the Grand and the Arkansas, the glow of the fireflies lighted the gathering darkness with a strange radiance which caused myself to marvel greatly."

"Yes, indeed; we have just cause to love and revere the land of our fathers," replied Constance, as they ascended the steps. "Mamma, here is Mantie and Mr. Raymond come to see you," she said, as she led her visitors to where her mother was sitting.

"How good of them, daughter, dear," smiled Mrs. Davidson, as she extended her hand to Phillip, and kissed the girl who had become almost as near as her own child. "I am very glad, Mr. Raymond, to have you come. I have often wished to see you and thank you again for your kindness to my daughter and myself."

"Thank you, Madam! Mantie is one of your close and warm admirers, and when I mentioned the fact of having to come to the Garrison she gladly took advantage of the opportunity. Believe me, I should have been glad to come ere this, but my affairs have been in such condition that I could not leave them for even the shortest period," said Raymond, with a look at Constance's face.

"It is our misfortune; but since you are a comparative stranger in our midst, and have so much to look after, it was hardly just for me to hope to see you again soon," added Mrs. Davidson.

"It is my desire that the time may come when I can see you frequently." Raymond said this with such a sound of longing in his tones that Constance trembled, while a strange expression settled upon her face.

Mantie noticed the look, and she felt a chill at her own heart, for she could foresee nothing but sorrow for this man who was fighting so valiantly.

For a time the conversation was continued in discussing the general and political topics of the day. Mrs. Davidson was strongly opposed to further legislation which tended to obliterate tribal relations, and her words were antagonistic when the subject was broached. She was also bitter in her opposition to the dismantling of the old Garrison, thus voicing a sentiment which existed in the heart of every inhabitant of the place, when she said:

"Mr. Raymond, I think it a shame to permit these historic buildings to become the property of any one individual! Why not set them aside for the purpose of creating a haven for the aged and infirm; where the pioneers may come and live out their declining days in peace, if they so desire? Or, better still, place them in the hands of some society. The very fact that such men as Sam Houston, Zachary Taylor, Washington Irving, and Jefferson Davis, with others too numerous to mention, have trod these vine-embowered walks, is enough to stimulate a national pride of such magnitude, as would result in the preserva-

tion of at least some of the edifices. Still, there is not much use for any one to say a word; it seems that nothing is sacred these days!"

Night was advancing, and its chill air caused Mrs. Davidson to leave the veranda and go, followed by Mantie, to her own room. Constance called Eliza and bade her light the parlor lamp.

"Will you come in, Mr. Raymond?" she asked, "the evening air is cool, and you will be more comfortable in the drawing-room!"

"Thank you, Mrs. McDowell! I have a message to deliver to you, and then we must return home," said Raymond, in a voice which he could scarcely render calm.

"A message!" exclaimed Constance. "For me! Why—" here she stopped, as a sense of some impending calamity took possession of her.

"Yes!" said Raymond, drawing a package from his pocket. "The other morning, at early dawn, Yellow Plume came to my home and related a story which filled me with vague yet groundless fears. He then gave me this package, requesting that I deliver it into your own hands. Joe is perfectly trustworthy, but I desired to accede to his request, as well as—to—come myself. If this be presumption, forgive me!"

Never had Constance seen the lines about his lips so deeply furrowed, nor his shoulders so stooped; and his eyes chilled her with their expression.

"There is nothing to forgive," she said. "I

should thank you for your courtesy and trouble." She took the package. "Does it require an answer?" she asked, as she received it from his hands.

"That I do not know; though, if so, you may trust me to deliver the same."

"Thank you!" said Constance, as she broke the seal and glanced at the closely written pages.

"You will please excuse me while I read; it is so strange!"

"Certainly!" replied Phillip, as he leaned wearily back in his chair, shading his eyes that he might look searchingly into her face. The stillness of death pervaded the room, and as he looked hungrily into the face of the woman he loved, he saw it grow haggard. A wild light shone in her eyes, and as her nerveless fingers allowed the last page to fall unheeded to the floor, a moan issued from her lips and she stared at him wildly. At last she said:

"Who did you say gave this to you? I dare not read it!"

"It was brought by your friend, Yellow Plume, two days after I returned home from the trial," answered Raymond.

"Do you know who it is from?" she asked breathlessly.

"Yes, Bart Nelson!" he replied.

"He is dead!"

"Yes, so I am told!"

"And you—you are, Oh, heavens! You are—are

his messenger, you whose life he would have taken—you—who are not Phillip Raymond, but—Jack Brainard!”

He was ready for what she was trying to say, and replied in low intense words:

“Yes, Constance Davidson—McDowell, I *am* Jack Brainard!”

Constance had arisen from her seat, and stood in front of him. Her hands were clinched. “I knew it—have known it for some time. Would to God it were but a dream—yet—yet—” and her slight form swayed, while the pallor on her face deepened. Vainly did she try to steady herself, only to fall into the arms of the man who clasped her convulsively to his bosom.

“Oh,” thought Raymond, “how beautiful she looked in her scorn of me!”

Constance struggled as she regained her composure, and drew away from him as if his touch were contaminating, yet the faintest flush crept into her cheeks. She did not utter a word, and Raymond, who could no longer endure the painful silence, said:

“Yes, you have believed me dead, and recently that the dead had returned, but were not sure until the day I pleaded my own cause as well as Elmore’s. Then I poured all the strength of my manhood into my words, yet you scorned me! Your freezing look blighted all the new-born hopes that had sprung into existence, and to-night my heart is as barren as a

waste of desert, and is longing for the last hour of my life when I can expiate my faults."

There was not one tinge of resentment in his words, and his form was straightened to its full height, as he continued: "Even now, I do not ask your love! I do not ask your consideration for one instant. I repeat, hope is eternally dead, and all I ask is that you will forget if you can, and remember that my crimes against you were not intentional; yet, pursued by the hand of Fate, I fell by the wayside, and have drunk to the bitter dregs, my chalice of folly. You would not heed me; I was denied the chance to refute the stories that were carried to your ears. There must have been a great error somewhere, but I was so in the dark that I—I—" He would have continued, had she not raised her hand, and bade him cease.

"You must have known that I loved you with all the strength of a woman's first love, yet you crushed my soul as with a gauntlet of steel," she cried bitterly.

"You are mistaken; it was not my work," said Raymond eagerly, as he advanced towards her.

"Then whose work was it, pray, if not yours?"

He could see that she was becoming excited, and not wishing to continue the conversation longer, he said simply, and in a voice weary with its hopelessness: "I accept all your opprobrium! Condemn me forever if you desire: I only repeat the request

which I have already made. Try and think kindly of me."

He smiled, while his lips quivered, and a sob arose from the heart of Constance, for in the innermost depths of her soul a small voice was pleading for the man she had known in the sunny days of her girlhood, but she said, pitilessly:

"You will permit me to thank you in your own name for all you have done for me and mine. The sense of my obligation is upon me, and I would there were some way by which I could liquidate the debt; but as there is not, I can only repay you by thinking kindly of the man whom I knew as Phillip Raymond, the owner of the Flint Plantation, and not as Jack Brainard—no—never!"

Footsteps were heard coming down the stairway, and Mantie stepped out on the veranda. Brainard secured his hat and stood waiting for her to get ready for the drive back to the valley of the Fourteen Mile. Constance watched them out of sight, and then bitter scalding tears coursed down her cheeks, the little voice of her heart was still begging to be heard.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Six months had flown on the wings of time. A great log fire burned in the open grate. Mantie Moses sat at her piano, playing dreamy music, while Phillip Raymond gazed meditatively into the roaring flames.

As from force of habit, Milo Canfield came often to the dwelling, and Mantie was very happy. Her guardian was well acquainted with the young man, who seemed as near as a younger brother, and warmly approved his visits.

Mrs. Davidson's gentle spirit had been called home and left her daughter deeply bereaved over the loss of one who was at once companion and mother. Raymond had not seen Constance since the night he called to deliver the dying message of Bart Nelson. Little did he dream of the struggle that for months had almost torn asunder the heart of the woman he loved so madly.

Mantie, who was a frequent visitor at the Elms, had in silence witnessed the battle, and hoped that ultimately there would be a reconciliation which would tend to bring happiness, though long delayed,

to both her guardian and Constance. Since the strange interview with Constance, Raymond had endeavored to conceal from every one his true state of mind, and as a result, had, at times, been gay, almost to frivolity; while in reality there was ever present in his soul a deep undercurrent of sadness.

The news of Bart Nelson's death in some way became generally known, and it was said that before he died he confessed to having fired the shot which took the life of the man whom Thomas Elmore was tried for killing. This report added greater glory to the name of Phillip Raymond, whose praise was already sung by all who had heard of his wonderful success.

Senator Bainbridge and his daughter frequently visited Raymond's home, and there were numerous gatherings of the young people at the Flint Plantation. Judge Walker often came to see the host, with whom he discussed matters of public interest. While all was light and warmth indoors, outside the leaves lay in dun heaps; the bare branches swayed in the icy blast; the songs of the birds were hushed; patches of snow relieved the landscape of an appearance of sameness, while adding chilliness; and the stern faces of the limestone cliffs were sharply outlined against the sky. Raymond, who had been surveying the scene from the library window, returned to the fireplace, saying:

"I think it will be rather a cold venture for those



“WHILE ALL WAS WARMTH INSIDE, OUTSIDE THE LEAVES LAY IN DUN HEAPS.
THE BARE BRANCHES SWAYED IN THE ICY BLASTS.”—PAGE 282.

who attend your party, Mantie. I believe we shall have snow before midnight. Ugh! hear the wind!"

"Guardie, please have more consideration for me than to predict anything so frightful," said Mantie, as she walked to the window and looked down the dreary vale. "I am sure they will come, regardless of the weather. Lucille told me there would be a dozen, and I have had Aunt Chloe preparing for them all day. She, like myself, would never survive the disappointment if they should fail to arrive."

"Yo' am right dah, Miss Mantie," said Chloe, as she put her head in at the door. "Ain't I done kill all de 'vailable chickens in de coop, an' didn't Joey hunt all de night fo' a 'possum, an' hain't de yams at de present time a-brownin', an' de gravy am rich es honey wid de dew f'om de firs' clobah blossom."

"Why, Aunt Chloe, you have the Ambrosia of the Gods to which I should like to have access at once," smiled Raymond.

"Now, look heah, Ma'se Phil; Chloe dunno nuffin' 'bout any sech eatin'; et may be scrumtious, but 'possum an' yallah yams am de bes' t'ing dat ebbah wahm de toof ob yoah humble sarvant, sah."

"I certainly agree with you on that point, Chloe," said Raymond, as the old woman cast a malicious look at Mantie.

"I 'spec' dah am som'n heah dat t'inks dar am oddah t'ings jes' es good es 'Brosia, but am not suah."

"Why, Aunt Chloe," cried Mantie, as rosy flushes chased one another over her lovely face; "how you talk!"

"'Scuse dis ol' niggah, Ma'se Phil," said Chloe, as she hobbled away, with Mantie's expostulating voice ringing in her ears.

That evening there was a merry scene at the home of Phillip Raymond. Chloe was not disappointed; a bevy of romping belles and dashing young men repaired to the home on the Fourteen Mile, and having been ushered into the reception-room, made themselves quite comfortable. Lucille Bainbridge assisted Mantie in caring for her guests, while her father and Judge Walker, who had braved the stormy night from genuine delight in Raymond's society, joined him in the library where they talked over weighty subjects while the young people enjoyed themselves in a manner suited to their age and inclination. Mantie was in an ecstasy of delight as Milo Canfield whispered sweet nothings in her rosy ear at every lull in the merry dance.

Chloe was bustling about the dining-room with an expression of extreme importance on her ebony face because of the responsibility of her position; while Joe furnished an accompaniment to the violin on his banjo.

"Let us have the old-fashioned dance of our fathers," cried Lucille, her eyes sparkling with animation. All present acceded to her proposal, and in-

stantly partners were chosen for an "Old Virginia Reel."

The musicians twanged their strings, and resined their bows.

"Honah yo' partner, 'antelman lef' ; swing yo' right, an' all run away. Ladies doce do, 'antlemen same. Swing once, an' half pass yo' partner on to the lef'. Cage the bird—Swing—Doce do, an' all go home," sang Ralph Nash, as lively strains of the "Arkansas Traveler" struck his ears, and away they went, lost in one of the old-time dances, which has no equal, and which will never lose its charm with the light-hearted young folks of the border.

After the dance, Chloe threw open the doors and invited the merrymakers to a repast, which she alone knew how to prepare. Senator Bainbridge occupied the seat of honor, and acted as toast-master of the occasion.

When the clock chimed the hour of midnight, the gentlemen of the party took their leave, and rode away over the hills. Mantie promised that the young ladies should be conveyed safely home on the following day. Although this arrangement was not altogether agreeable to the wishes of the escorts, they submitted to the inevitable. When the house was quiet and all the young folks asleep except Mantie and her friend Lucille, they sat by the ruddy fire and talked in low tones.

"Mantie," whispered Lucille, as if afraid her words

would be heard, "do you know I believe there is a mystery of some kind existing between your guardian and Constance McDowell!"

"Why, my dear, you must be dreaming," said Mantie, as she caught her breath.

"No, I am not dreaming! But say—Oh bless your life, it is too much for me to keep, so if you will promise not to tell, I will relate what took place at the Elms during my last visit there. While I am aware it is not polite to tell what occurs during one's visit at a place, still you seem like one of my own, and I assure you I should never repeat this anywhere else."

"Well?"

"Cross your heart, now sure!"

"Yes, I cross my heart that I will not tell!"

"Not even Mr. Canfield?"

"Why, no! No more than you would tell Ralph Nash," laughed Mantie, bringing a blush to the olive cheeks of Lucille.

"Well, I must tell it. Here I have been wrestling with this for a long while, and more than once it has been on the tip of my tongue to tell you."

"Well, go ahead! I am listening."

"Well," said Lucille in a stage whisper, "I truly believe that Constance is in love with Mr. Phillip Raymond."

"Oh gracious! Lucille, the idea!" exclaimed

Mantie, repressing an exultant smile which brightened her face.

"No, I am not! because the other day I was over to see her, and somehow or other, his name came up, and she made several remarks which have puzzled me ever since. And as she talked, there crept into her voice such an accent of tenderness. She asked me what papa thought of Mr. Raymond, and dozens of similar questions. Now, if she were not especially interested in him, why was she so fond of talking about him? Then, too, you remember that it was he who brought little Hal back from the kidnappers. By the way, she told me of that horrid Bart Nelson's infatuation for her."

After a pause, Mantie said:

"Lucille, it is not for us to know, but if what you infer is true, then let us hope that some time the poor girl may be happy. She is the sweetest woman I ever knew, and my heart bleeds for her now that she has lost her mother."

Mantie's manner of dismissing the subject puzzled Lucille, and long after she sought her pillow she studied the situation, trying vainly to fathom the mystery. The next morning at the breakfast table, Lucille looked at the grave face of her host and wondered, as many another had, what could have caused this man to leave the bustle of city life and seek the solitude of a forest.

"Well, Aunt Chloe," said Raymond, as that good-

natured personage came in with a savory dish which she deposited in the center of the table, "have you any of the angels' food left for this bevy of hungry girls? They must be famished after turning day into night and then waiting until eleven for their morning meal."

"No, sah! dar am not de leas' bit ob et lef'; an' las' night dat ol' man ob mine almos' cry w'en he see de las' mo'sel ob 'possum lef' de pot, sah! Angels' food nuffin'! Why, Ma'se Phil, dar am a couple ob de young ladies heah dat didn't hab 'nuff las' night, an' I see Ma'se Canfiel' an' Ma'se Ralph huntin' 'roun' in de bac' parlor fo' some ob de 'Brosia las' night, 'bout twelve o'clock, an' Missus Mantie an' anoddah lady war 'sistin' dem."

Mantie's face grew crimson, while laughter convulsed the others, as she retorted to Aunt Chloe:

"I'll tell Mr. Canf——"

"Yo' doan need t', kase he already kno'; ain't Chloe seed him, an' Ma'se Ralph, too? Ob cose," grinned Chloe, with a shake of her head.

It suddenly seemed to dawn on the company that something out of the ordinary had transpired which had not escaped the eyes of Chloe, and Mabel Wilson said to Lucille, with mock gravity: "Miss Bainbridge, I presume congratulations are in order!" Lucille was considerably embarrassed, for she fondly imagined her sweet secret to be all her own.

Della Barnett arose to her feet, with a glass of

clear cold water in her hand. "Let us drink to the health of our friends!" It was done, and soon after, the gay party repaired to their rooms, where they prepared to take their leave.

* * * * *

On that eventful evening so long ago when Phillip brought Constance the package, she watched Mantie and her escort until they were out of sight, then picked up the pages of Bart Nelson's letter which, in her excitement, had fallen to the floor. Rearranging the leaves, she sat down for the purpose of again reading it.

The pages were closely written, yet legible, and as her eyes skimmed over page after page, her heart went out to the man who had just left her. While Raymond was present she had but glanced at the heading and looked over the body of the letter casually, and without grasping the full meaning.

"Oh my God!" she cried, as she finished the last page. "What have I done? What can I do? After all, Jack was not guilty, and I have driven him from me forever! Sent him away in my anger; spurned him as if he were as vile as damnation itself! Oh my love, forgive! forgive!" and she stretched out her hands in the direction of his home.

"Father in heaven, look down from thy white throne, and have mercy! Save the heart of your child from breaking! Send my own love back to me, that I may tell him all—all! Send him back that I may

make plain the delusion under which I have lived all these bitter years!" With these agonizing words wrung from her tortured heart, Constance sank to the floor, and was found thus by Eliza when she came to close the house for the night.

The faithful darkey hastily procured some restoratives, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing Constance restored to consciousness. "Eliza, he has returned; he has asked me to forgive him, but I scorned him—spurned him! Oh, my poor heart!"

Eliza could not understand, though she tried to pacify her young mistress. "Who am et, dearie? Cain't yo' tol' yoah ol' mammy?"

Tears trickled slowly down Constance's white cheeks, as she caught Eliza's hands, and whispered: "Jack has come back. He has been in this room, and"—she faltered, as sobs shook her frame, "he asked me to forgive him the wrong I thought he had done me, but I would not listen to his pleadings, and with bitter reproaches, sent him away! What can I do, Eliza? I shall die; my heart will break! Oh, oh, oh!" and she buried her head on her black mammy's shoulder, and wept.

As Eliza began to realize the situation, she said: "Lawd hab mussy on de po' chile! 'Liza been knowin' fo' some time pas' dat dah wah sump'n' cuyus gwine t' happen, tho' she nebbah t'ink ob dis, kaze she hab be'n ob de 'pinion dat Ma'se Brainard wah dead! Howsumebbah, de las' time dat 'Liza

read de stahs, she see many t'ings dah dat 'fuse huh haid! Yo' po' chile, jes' put yoah trus' in de Lawd, an' pray lak de sinnah yo' is. Ax 'Im t' pahdon yoah 'gressions, an' mek' yo' lak a li'l chile dat am humble; den yoah heah't'll 'come light es a feddah, an' joy'll bubble f'om yoah lips all de day long!"

"Oh, Eliza, do you believe that? Do you think God can forgive me? I have been so scornful, so rebellious!"

"Missus, doan de good Book say dat de Lawd kin mek us whiter'n de snow? An' doan 'Liza kno', do she am but a po' niggah, whose bac' hab felt de sting ob de lash, an' whose eyes hab see de chillun ob huh bosom sol' down Souf', nebbah t' retuhn, she beliebes, an' huh 'liance am on de Lawd, an' she become strongah ebery day, an' ebery week, an' ebery yeah. T'ank de bressed Lawd, 'Liza c'n look yondah wha' de clouds gather de watahs ob life, an' shed de pearly draps on de sinful earf, an' dah she c'n see de li'l' faces ob de chillun dat went t' de Souf nigh on t' fifty yeahs agone. Yas, Missus, et am all plain es de risin' sun, an' 'Liza is gwine dar soon—yas, gwine home, wha' she c'n gaddah de li'l' ones in huh ahms, an' walk int' de presence ob de Saviour wid clean han's an' a puah heah't, an' git de crown dat he promis' in de Book ob books. An' honey, yo' c'n do de same t'ing, ef yo' place yoah trus' in 'Im."

Eliza's simple faith was like a revelation to the burdened heart of Constance, and as she lay there

with closed eyes, a revolution took place in her soul; she felt the darkness slipping away, and her heart was filled with gratitude; all the bitterness of her life was sweetened with the faith and spiritual strength which comes to all for the simple asking.

"Eliza, you know my secret now, and I feel sure that you will keep it close in your own heart. I have been blinded all these years, and lived with the pall of hatred hanging over me; but, thank God! the scales have fallen from my eyes, and I can see the way clear. But—he—Jack—has gone out of my life with my words of condemnation in his ears. Ah, I see his white face now! I see the pleading look in his eyes; I hear his sad voice, as he spoke to me this evening; and, oh, Eliza, I love him! I love him with all the strength of my soul—and I have loved him all these years, but my love was smothered by hate, and now it is too late—too late! You may go now, Eliza; I would be alone!" Eliza went softly from the room, and Constance once more read the letter sent to her from the grave. It ran:

"MRS. CONSTANCE McDOWELL,

"GARRISON HILL.

"You will pardon this last intrusion, for it will be the last, as even now my fingers are stiffening, and I feel the death-damp creeping upon my brow. I hear the call of the Grim Destroyer. Yes, these

are the last words that the hand of Bart Nelson will ever pen. Constance (Oh, how sweet the name; you will not frown now, for I am dying, dying, Constance), many years ago, when we were just entering the springtime of life, after leaving the seminary, I met the one who was to become the unconscious agent of my doom. I loved that one with all the madness, all the fervency of my race, and thought she loved me. Vain thought! One day, she told me with tears in her eyes that her heart was not hers any longer—that a man from the East had won it, and that she loved him.

“How my heart burned with mad jealousy! How my soul writhed with all the tortures of Hell! How my blood coursed! The vision of earthly happiness faded, and I became mad—pitiless—vengeful! Even now I can see the savageness of my face, reflected through all these years! Ah, would to God the end could have come then, and that I could have passed away with the memory of those tears fresh in my mind; but no, it was not to be thus—I was to live—live to bring sorrow and pain to the woman I loved, and drive the man of her choice from the land by the machinations of a devil incarnate. Can you forgive me, Constance (for it was you) all the sorrow I caused you?

“Before I enter the unknown world there is one wrong I would right, and I pray God it may not be too late! I was the enemy of the man you loved! I

swore vengeance, and did not allow anything to come between me and the execution of that vengeance! I caused stories to come to your ears, telling you how unfaithful he was to his plighted troth; how unworthy he was of you, and believing these stories, you scorned him; you sent him into exile, with the curse of the Indian maiden hanging over him. For years he roamed the trackless earth a wanderer, yet he was preserved, and came back to the valley of the Fourteen Mile.

"My agent was ever on the alert, and acquainted me with the fact at once, and all the hatred of my people arose in my breast.

"What mattered it? There was already a price upon my head. Your mother held the proofs of my first mad act; society shunned me, and as I saw the possibility of a reconciliation between you and Brainard, flames of relentless hatred burned against yourself as well as against the man who had done me no wrong except that of loving you.

"Then it was I conceived the idea of stealing your child, believing, and rightly, that the man whom you knew as Phillip Raymond would follow me to the hills, and then, it was my plan that he should die—die by my hand.

"Again, I ask you to forgive me if you can. It was my mad love for you that drove me to the verge of perdition, and my own evil acts that have barred me from the peaceful life so dear to man.

"Should he ever come to you, listen to him—listen, for, Constance, he is innocent of all wrong to you; the blame is all my own.

"It is growing dark, Constance, dark—as the Valley of death—I see the forms of—devils upon devils—they are reaching out their arms for me—they tear my vitals—I go—I go—God whom I have never acknowledged, have mercy! I go—. My eyes are blinded, and the roar of death's river is in mine ears—and engulfs my lost soul—forgive—for—Con—"

As she finished the last page, the tears flowed down her cheeks, and she whispered softly, as she held the letter to a tiny flame:

"Yes, poor, deluded soul, I forgive, and pray that in some mysterious way God at the last forgave you, and that your future beyond the clouds may be brighter than your stormy past!"

For a long time Constance lingered in the fire-light, trying to reach some conclusion, but her mind was so confused she could not think connectedly, so with a weary sigh she turned the lamp low, and sought her own apartments.

CHAPTER XXXIX

IN the early springtime following the death of Mrs. Davidson in the fall, Constance was walking beneath the trees on the bank of the River Grand, little dreaming that she was the object of a pair of dark eyes, which gazed longingly at her from a point farther down the stream.

She was dressed in deep mourning, and walking slowly towards a ledge of rock which extended out into the little bay, and which from time immemorial had been the resort of pleasure-seekers, who were in the habit of coming down the river to watch the limpid waves.

The sun was sinking low in the west where the shadows lengthened to the river's edge. She paused here, and looked away to the north, and then to the west, where she could almost see the junction of the Grand with the murky waters of the Arkansas.

To the east, the "Garrison" reared its white and red buildings, their slate roofs gleaming dully in the soft rays of amber light.

There were the quarters of the soldiers; the home



"SHE WAS DRESSED IN DEEP MOURNING AND WALKING SLOWLY TOWARD A LEDGE
OF ROCK WHICH EXTENDED INTO THE LITTLE BAY."—PAGE 296.

of the commanding officers, the adjutant, and the low rambling stables used by the cavalry.

How isolated it all looked, and Constance's heart longed for companionship, while her head sank lower and lower on her heaving bosom.

She found a seat on a ledge of rock, and was startled from her deep reverie by a low voice saying:

"Pardon me, but may I intrude upon your solitude?"

Looking hastily up, she saw Phillip Raymond looking down at her. She was much agitated, as he had been the sole subject of her thoughts.

"Certainly, Mr.—Mr.—Raymond," she said, hesitatingly, as if at a loss which name to address him by.

"Thank you for your kind permission, also for the use of that name." Then he said sadly, "Yes, thank you doubly, for the other name is dead—dead—as the past with which it was associated, and like that past, must be forgotten!" His lips twitched, and his words smote her heart with a pang, as she knew he had indeed buried his hopes forever, and would never again speak as he had spoken the night he delivered to her Bart Nelson's letter. She felt as if a cold hand clutched her heart-strings, for all her old love had reawakened, and she had been hoping and longing for the time when they might meet again?

Why did she not immediately explain that she had changed her views after reading the letter carefully? Had she only regarded him in the light of friendship,

she could have done this very glibly, but love has strange power to still the lips, and furnishes many excuses for keeping the heart silent.

What a blessing are the commonplace remarks which may season every conversation, and serve to conceal many a heart-scar from the gaping world.

"Have you been in town long?" asked Constance by way of saying something to break the painful silence.

"Miss Moses had some shopping to do, so we drove in from the valley early in the afternoon, and as she had promised to call on Miss Bainbridge, I wandered off here to await the hour for starting home."

"So Mantie is in town too! I should like to see her; she has such a bright happy nature that no one can be lonely in her presence."

"Yes, Mantie is proof against melancholy. At home she is all life, and has her own fun with Aunt Chloe!"

"So Lucille tells me!"

"You should not be sad, Mrs. McDowell—still if you are, I shall feel tempted to send Mantie over for a few days to cheer you up!"

"I shall indeed be glad to have her come; she is always a welcome guest at the Elms, and has a standing invitation."

"It will afford me much pleasure to tell her this; and as I have been thinking of leaving the country

for a while, there is no one whom I should be so willing to trust her with as yourself."

"Thinking of leaving the country!" echoed Constance, with a wild pain at her heart.

"Yes, I want to go away for a year at least."

"Then who would care for the Plantation?" she asked with a tremor in her voice.

"Joe and Aunt Chloe are perfectly trustworthy; then there is the overseer, Mr. Zielowsky."

"Oh, yes, I remember; he is the funny little man who looks after your business when you are not disposed to do so yourself. I have heard Mantie and Lucille both mention him as being quite faithful."

"Yes, he is all of that! He has been with me a long time—in fact we were together in Texas some years ago, and have been associated ever since."

"Tell me of him. Mantie says there is some mystery about him, and she seems to be afraid of him. She says he has such penetrating eyes."

"Would that I might tell you, but I am not able to read him myself. He has always been Jack Zielowsky to me, and the same to every one who has met him. That he was born in some part of Germany is known to me, but the exact spot is not to be divulged, as he has sworn me to secrecy on that point. My private opinion is that in some manner he had become mixed up in a nihilistic plot and had to flee the country to save himself."

"Ah! so bad as that?"

"I believe that to be the truth, but of course, cannot vouch for its accuracy!"

Constance, who was painfully anxious to know more of the contemplated journey, said:

"Have you become disgusted with the primitive customs of your neighbors, that you are so desirous of leaving them?"

He looked at her earnestly, and had he known what was in her mind, would have answered her differently:

"No, not that! I am simply weary! I came here to find rest, but have been disappointed. A wanderer has no abiding place, and finds it difficult to abandon the excitement of travel. As my health will not permit me to indulge in study, I shall do the next best thing, that is, go away for a time—perhaps forever!"

"Forever is a long time," she almost whispered.

"Yes, to look ahead it seems that way; but my staying only brings back memories that were best forgotten."

His allusion to the past was spoken bitterly, and she raised her eyes and looked him squarely in the face. Neither spoke for some time, yet each heart was throbbing with eagerness for an opportunity to reach an understanding.

Looking at his watch, and seeing it was nearly time to join Mantie, Phillip said:

"Mrs. McDowell, it is fortunate for me, at least, that I found you here; for it would be hard to leave

without bidding you farewell. It may be presumptuous in me to mention my wish after what you said to me the last time we met, but there can surely be no great harm in saying good-by forever. There is nothing left, yet, O God! How I have lived in sweet anticipation of the hour when I might strive to win back the love of Constance Davidson, as you were when the fatal letter reached your hands, that caused you to send me adrift on the storm-tossed ocean of life, without compass or rudder. Even up to the hour that I acted as the messenger of my enemy, was I inspired by this hope—aye, even after our last interview, for hope is something which struggles for existence, but now, it is dead—forever dead, crushed into nothingness by the hand I so fondly loved. Remember, I do not plead my cause again; I did that before the world, and in vain; only allow me to take your hand for the last time.”

As he finished speaking she arose to her feet, and stood before him with a face drawn and white. A pleading look crept into her eyes, and she clasped her hands so tightly that the nails were buried in the tender flesh.

He grasped both her hands in his, and pressing them convulsively, released them, and turned to go.

“Jack, my heart’s love, don’t go! don’t go! Don’t you see—can’t you see that I am all your own? I know all now; the letter told me. I know how I wronged you all these dreary years—and how I

wronged myself! Jack, forgive me if you can, and stay!"

At these words he reeled, and turned again to look at her.

"Constance, Constance! Do not jest! Love me! No, no! it is impossible! You cannot mean what you say—you are jesting!"

He moved slowly towards her, holding out his hands, his voice coming in low gasps, while his bowed form seemed trying to throw off the accumulated weight of years.

"Yes, yes, Jack, it is true! I do love you, Jack; God in heaven knows I do!"

"Then I have not lived in vain!" he cried passionately.

"No, not in vain!" she echoed, with a glad ring in her voice, "and this is your reward," she said, holding out her hand, which he clasped in both his own, and carried it to his lips.

"Constance, my Constance, at last! This is too good to be true!" he said, in a bewildered manner, as if he could scarcely believe his senses. "After all, it may be but a mad, mad dream!"

"Ah, no, Jack, it is no dream, but a sweet reality, and a gladness too deep for words fills my soul."

All thought of Mantie, who might be waiting for him, slipped from his mind, and again they seated themselves, while he listened as she told him all, concluding with:

"Yes, our enemy has opened the grave which held our dead love for so long, and this is the glad day of its resurrection. With his tardy words he has righted the wrongs which have hung like a pall over me; and I can almost find it in my heart to forgive him, now that you have come back to me," she added with a confiding smile.

"Yes, I too could forgive, but there is a Higher Power that is the arbiter of his future destiny now, and we are left to revel in the joys of the days to come."

Neither of them noticed the shadows which had lengthened and overspread the landscape. Neither heard the dulcet voices of Mantie and Lucille, as they walked slowly by, for they were lost in Elysian fields of infinite joy.

"Lucille," said Mantie in laconic tones, pointing in the direction of the still forms on the rocks, "I think there must be something wrong down there."

"Well, I am rather of your opinion," said Lucille, as they walked farther up the stream.

CHAPTER XL

It was late when Mantie and Raymond reached the Fourteen Mile that evening, for he had lingered long in the smiles of his Constance, and could hardly tear himself away, though night was at hand, and his valley home miles distant.

As they sped along beneath the interlacing branches, Mantie perceived that something unusual had occurred, for there was a new light in her guardian's eyes, and a joyous tone in his voice as he conversed.

Chloe was nonplussed at his unwonted gaiety, and long after the house was closed for the night, said to Joe:

"'Clar t' goodness, Joey, sump'n' in de aih! Did yo' see de bright light dat wah on Ma'se Phil's face?"

"Did yo' see de sun rise dis mahn'n', Chloe?" Joe said in a manner which indicated that she was the tardy one to observe the change in Ma'se Phillip.

Raymond was up and about the plantation bright and early on the following morning. He seemed

enthused with new life, and with a renewed interest in his surroundings. Great, and long-needed changes were made in the valley, and the condition of the tenants as a result was much improved.

The whole plantation became a hive of industry, and many grateful glances followed the disappearing form of the public benefactor, as he left the houses after speaking kind, encouraging words, and, when necessary, giving substantial aid.

With his sanction, Mantie went from house to house, ministering to the aged and infirm with a lavishness entirely new to them.

His friends at the "Garrison" were amazed at the transformation which had been wrought in the owner of the "Flint Plantation."

As the balmy April days rolled by, he was often seen driving to the Elms. Mantie and Canfield, on horseback, often accompanied him, and joined by Constance, would ride through the grand old forest.

Constance had grown young again, and her smiling face continually wore a happy, contented expression.

Excursions were planned, which carried the merry quartette far out in the hills; sometimes to the cabin of Yellow Plume, who dozed peacefully beneath the swaying branches of the sycamores, and whose dark eyes lighted with dull flashes, as he looked upon the happiness manifested in the serene

face of the "Singing Bird," as he was wont to call Constance, and his voice was fraught with pathos, as he spoke to Mantie on one occasion:

"So the 'Laughing Eyes' has listened to the cooing of the sweet words, and her little heart has found a mate among my people! "'Tis well! Let them ever walk in the white path, and the songs of the Great Spirit will forever ring in their hearts. But let them go in the crooked road, and Manitou will close his eyes, and harden his heart to them.

"The heart of Yellow Plume is glad; and when he goes to the Happy Hunting Grounds, he will tell Kiswee that she may rejoice with him. Then, 'Laughing Eyes,' we will look down from the clouds, and when the winds blow upon you, you will know that the eyes of your friends who sleep are upon you, and their breath is driving trouble from your brows, and kissing your lips."

Mantie, Lucille, Milo and Ralph stood beneath the old trees, as Yellow Plume uttered his benediction, while Constance and Raymond loitered in the distance, conversing animatedly.

Turning his eyes in their direction, Yellow Plume said:

"The heart of the Singing Bird is light, since the Great Spirit smiled upon her, and the grave has given up its dead!"

This was the first intimation of the true situation, which had reached the ears of Ralph Nash and Milo

Canfield, and they turned expectant glances to the sober faces of their lady friends.

"What does Yellow Plume mean?" asked Ralph, eagerly.

"Yes, what is this given up by the grave?" echoed Milo, for it will be remembered that neither of them knew the true identity of Phillip Raymond.

"Oh, now, you are just a little too curious!" said Lucille.

"And we shall not tell," said Mantie. "It remains for you to find an answer to your question from the gentleman whom it most concerns!"

"But who is the gentleman?" asked Ralph.

"I shall not tell you, Mr. Curiosity," said Mantie teasingly.

Constance and Phillip had by this time rejoined the group, and Yellow Plume looking at Raymond, said:

"The heart of my friend laughs! and it is well! Harken to the Yellow Plume:

"The end of the Plant Moon is at hand, and the heart of the Yellow Plume is glad with song! Manitou has been good. He has sent the wandering breeze to lift the clouds from the heart of the Singing Bird, and she too, is happy. 'Laughing Eyes' has also listened to the words of my friend, the ranger, and she laughs with joy. Only the heart of the Yellow Plume is sad.

"My children, there are not many suns left to the

Yellow Plume, for I hear the voice of Kiswee calling—she is calling for me, and soon shall I lay down the bow, to slip away over the great trail to the Hunting Grounds of my fathers. When the Traveling Moon has come, I shall go, leaving the nation of my people for a land bright with the stars of eternal peace.

“My hunt has been long; many changes have come to the land of my people, and as the suns go by, I see the end—the end. But the Yellow Plume will not look upon it, for he will be sleeping under the flowers of the valley.

“I have never crossed the path of the pale face, nor have I angered the runners of the forest, yet my heart burned against one who spoke with a crooked tongue to the ‘Singing Bird’ when he came to my cabin some moons ago.”

He looked at Raymond, who bowed his head, as he clasped the hand of Constance, and drew her closer to him.

She knew, as did Raymond, that the old man had reference to the time they met at his home, when Mantie was with them.

Raymond arose to his feet, and with uncovered head, led Constance to the aged Chieftain, and said:

“Will the Yellow Plume bless the love of the Singing Bird and his pale-faced friend?”

“Yes,” said the Indian, and lifting his hands to the heavens, and looking at them in the light of the dying sun, said:

"Yes, and may the words of evil and crooked tongues be forever at rest against thee. My daughter, you have been kind to the Yellow Plume, and his heart is glad that you are happy! So be it!"

When the sun had sunk behind the distant hills, the young people took their leave of Yellow Plume, who lingered alone with his sorrows.

On the return home, Mantie related the story of Constance and Phillip to Milo, who later enlightened Ralph.

CHAPTER XLI

SOME days after the visit to Yellow Plume, Senator Bainbridge received the greatest shock of his life; one which filled him with amazement, and which excited him so he could scarcely grasp its romantic details.

He was in his room reading the Advocate, when he saw the conspicuous heading of a half-column, which caused him to elevate his brows, and utter a low whistle, as he ejaculated:

"Well—I'll—be—dummed," then rising to his feet, cried excitedly.

"Lucille!—damme! Lucille," then he adjusted his glasses, and looked again. "Well—"

"What is it, papa?" she asked, as she came hurrying in.

"What is it—thunderation! that's what I want to know myself! Strange! Yes, damme—strange! Very strange!" he cried, walking up and down, waving the paper over his head.

"Listen, Lucille! Damme, it's about that fellow, Phillip Raymond," and he looked over his glasses at

his daughter, as if he would impress her with the gravity of the situation.

"About Mr. Raymond! Oh, read it, papa! I am so anxious to know what has excited you so much!"

"No, you read it, Lucille!" said her father, handing her the paper, and pointing to an article, with glaring headlines.

"A ROMANCE IN REAL LIFE.

"A FORMER CITIZEN, AFTER AN ABSENCE
OF MANY YEARS HAS RETURNED, AND
FOR MONTHS HAS LIVED AMONG US
WITHOUT BEING RECOGNIZED BY
ANY OF HIS ACQUAINTANCES.

"The residents of 'Garrison Hill' were astonished, when, on Monday last, it became known that the Hon. Phillip Raymond was none other than an old citizen who has been sojourning for some years in the distant West, and who has returned to make his home in their midst.

"Mr. Raymond's true name is Jack Brainard, who left this country, in the early days of the mining excitement of Creede and Cripple Creek, where he went to retrieve his fortune. He was successful beyond his most sanguine hopes, and has a competency which will keep him in affluent circumstances the remainder of his life.

"It is rumored by the older inhabitants of the 'Garrison' that an estrangement with a young lady, who was the belle of the town at that time, caused him to go into exile.

"Returning, he purchased her ancestral home, and has wrought wonderful improvements thereon.

"Dame Rumor goes even further, and says that Mr. Brainard will soon lead to the altar the beautiful Mrs. McDowell."

As she finished reading, Lucille's eyes danced with glee, and she exclaimed:

"Oh, papa! who would have dreamed of anything so enchanting! How wonderful!"

"Well, I—gad—I think so! Yes, dang me, it reads like a story-book. Jack Brainard! Knew him well! Never thought there was much in 'im, though! Wild—yes—damme! And you, Lucille, have been spending half your time with Mrs. McDowell, and Ray—I mean Brainard's ward, Miss—what the deuce is her name? Can't think of it to save my life! Ah, yes," he continued, "Moses, yes, that's it! Moses—pretty name—good looking girl, too, by gings! Canfield's crazy about her! Blind as a bat, gosh!" and the distinguished Senator had to stop for sheer want of breath.

"Sit down, papa! Sit down! You are too much excited for me to talk to you!"

"Excited! Not a whit! not a whit! What do you

know about excitement?" and he took another turn about the room, with his hands clutching the long flaps of his Prince Albert, waving them like a danger signal.

"Well, you are dying to tell me something! Fire away! fire away!" and her father looked at the amused face of his daughter, as if he would read her every secret.

But Lucille told him nothing, for the simple reason that she knew very little, except what by this time was common property. All her efforts to beguile Mantie into betraying Constance's confidence, had been futile.

However, it soon became generally known that for some reason Jack Brainard had for years concealed his identity, and it proved a delicious morsel for the "Mother Grundies" about the little town, for a much longer period than the stipulated nine days.

CHAPTER XLII

MAY rolled by; June went too, with its wealth of roses, and the warm days of July came to the valley of the Fourteen Mile.

There was to be a grand celebration at the "Garrison." Flaming posters glared at one from every conspicuous point, telling of the great expectations of the day.

A fever of excitement was upon all the countryside as the Fourth drew near, and the various committees taxed themselves to the utmost, trying to make it one of the most complete successes the community had ever witnessed.

Dancing platforms, merry-go-rounds, swings for the children, flower-booths for the ladies, shady nooks for the aged, a contract for a unique balloon ascension, and numerous other attractions were mentioned on the program.

The long-looked-for day dawned with unprecedented radiance, and was welcomed joyfully by old and young.

There could be heard the sound of innumerable guns by "Young America;" Old Glory floated from

the long-neglected staff; the lawns were thronged with hundreds of happy care-free people.

Mantie and Lucille were strolling down the shaded walk, conversing in low tones, while Ralph and Milo were drawing near the magnets of their existence.

Heck Talbot was there, and his presence served to hold the restless element in check, for all law-breakers knew by past experience that any infringement of justice would meet with speedy retribution.

Hundreds came from the hills with their families, and loitered about the grounds in groups. It was the gala day of the season, and, as yet, no cloud had arisen.

The old "Garrison" had on its holiday attire; bunting floated from every available place, waving to all a cordial greeting.

The merry voices of the dancers could be heard above the confusion, inseparable from such an occasion, and their favorite pastime continued until long after the sun had sunk behind the western horizon.

It was a day long to be remembered by those who had come from afar to celebrate the greatest holiday in American History.

Constance and Jack were together as in the sweet old days, before their happiness was marred by the "trail of the serpent."

Constance said, in speaking of her new-found joy:
"It cannot last, dear Jack! I feel in my soul that

it cannot last!" and she shuddered, while he drew her close to his side, and vowed to shield her from all harm.

Ah, how little does frail humanity know of the decrees of Fate!

Suddenly, Constance looked across the driveway, and saw her son playing in childish unconsciousness. A dull rumbling caused her to look around nervously. All day there had been present in her soul a haunting sense of impending calamity. She had told Brainard of her fears, and he had soothed her with loving words. Now as she started, this fear of approaching evil rushed over her like an avalanche. Louder came the rumble, as if wheels were being turned with lightning speed. She could not see the road, which made an abrupt turn to the right, yet her fright was not allayed, and she called Hal to come to her. The little fellow arose to his feet, but did not move. Brainard was aware that something was wrong, for the child seemed chained to the spot, looking ahead of him, his dark eyes distended with horror.

"Quick, Jack! Oh, God! My child! My child!"

Around a bend in the road rushed a pair of maddened horses, dragging in their wake the gun which had been used to fire the national salute earlier in the day. In their path stood Constance McDowell's child. Nothing could save him now, for the horses were almost upon him. Their flaming eyes flashed like balls of fire; their nostrils were quivering and red with

rage. The driver lost control of them, and they were tearing madly down the road where stood the helpless boy. In another instant the huge wheels would grind his tender flesh to atoms.

Heedless of his own safety, Jack Brainard sprang from the side of Constance. Could he save the child? It was doubtful, but he would try! With one swift glance of love and adoration at the white face of the agonized mother, he plunged on. Heavens! the boy did not move! The very breath of the furious animals fanned the baby face; the cruel thud of the iron-bound hoofs thundered against the ground!

Hundreds of men and women held their breath. Oh, God! Would the boy be saved? Every nerve was tingling; blood surged in hot waves to Brainard's head, and his lips tightened; the distance was but a space now; he could almost touch the child. The lookers-on were spell-bound—riveted to the spot. Their breath came in stifling gasps, which almost choked them. Heavens!—they turned away—as a human form went down before the plunging steeds. There was a low cry of mortal anguish, and a sickening crash of hoofs upon something.

Constance looked—her gaze meaningless, her bosom heaving, her hands clutching her heart, and her lips as pallid as those of the dead.

She saw her child tossed from the path of the merciless wheels,—thrown by the hand of the man, who for her sake had gone to his death.

Yes, her child was saved, but what was that silent mass which tender hands were lifting from the ground?

The frenzied horses had plunged by where she stood, and down the hill, but this new horror—God!—and her heart grew cold as death—in her misery, she clutched at the air.

They laid him at her feet—cold—mangled—the brown eyes closed—forever closed to the glories of earth. His marble-like face, stern even in death, appealed to her. She looked upon him, then turned to Mantie, who had stolen up to her side, and threw her arms around her neck.

Poor Constance put out her hands blindly, and whispered in a voice so low that it could scarce be heard:

“Jack! Jack! My heart’s own true love! Come back! Come back!” and the pathetic words died away in a whisper.

Once more she looked at the mute face! It was cold—and clammy—and dead!

CHAPTER XLIII

MANY months have passed away, and their lights and shadows, their roses and snowdrifts have fallen upon the grave of Jack Brainard; and Constance mourns him with a grief which will never cease.

Yellow Plume has laid down his bow, and the quiver hangs upon the walls of his cabin. The hunt has ended, and in the "Happy Hunting Grounds," he listens to the caressing tones of his long lost Kiswee.

The light flickers low in the eyes of Chloe, as her friends gather around to hear her parting words.

Mantie weeps upon the shoulder of Milo Canfield, who is now her husband. Silence falls upon all, as the voice of the aged negress comes in whispers:

"Joey, et am two long yeahs—yas, two long lonesome yeahs since Ma'se Jack wah laid to res'. De li'l' Missus' heaft am sad, an' she am growin' weaker an' weaker ebery day. 'Twon't be long till de lilies 'll be hidin' huh grabe f'om de eyes ob de worl'.

"De home in de valley am no mo' ! Soon Ma'se Canfiel' 'll carry de li'l' Mantie bac' t' de lan' ob huh birf, wha' dey'll fo'git de graves ob dey frien's.

"'Liza am sleepin' de long sleep, Joey, an' de bref

of Chloe am 'bout all spent. My haih am white es de cotton, an' my heajt am sadder'n de wail ob de win's dat blo' tro' de trees. De lamp ob life am buhnin' low; but befo' I go t' de li'l' ones, up yondah, Joey, I wants t' heah yo' sing one mo' song, say one mo' prahah, an' den I'll go widout a marmuh.

"Joey, Chloe am gwine t' de lan' ob res' wha' she'll fin' de ol' Ma'se, de ol' Missus, an' Ma'se Jack; but t'ank de good Lawd, I kno' I'll fin' de chillun; dey'll come t' me an' put dey ahms 'roun' me, an' say, 'Mammy, mammy!' Yas, dey'll be wa'tin' fo' me, Joey, an' w'en I gets dar, I'll tol' dem dat yo' am on de road, an' den Ma'se an' Missus, an' Ma'se Jack, an' de li'l' brac' angels 'll all 'sem'le at de gate t' see yo', w'en de lamp ob life am buhned out fo' yo'—

"Dah, Joey, put yoah ahms 'roun' me, an' lif' me up, so I c'n git one mo' look et de hills, an' see de cohn wabin' in de fiel's, fo' I wants t' go t' de 'New Jerusale'm' wid my eyes lookin' bright es stahs, so's I c'n tol' Ma'se Jack—Joey, et am gittin' da'k now—hol' me jes' a li'l' w'ile, an' den yo' c'n lay me down.

"Joey, look! look! Joey, I sees de gates swingin' wide—dey am alibe wid angels, an' de sweetes' music dat ebbah come t' de eahs ob Chloe am flowin' f'om dey lips.

"Joy! joy! dar am de Ma'se an' de Missus, an' et 'peahs lak I c'n see some'n bowin' et de foot ob de King. Oh, Joey, et am Ma'se Jack! Dah am de li'l' ones dat come t' de cabin ob yo' an' me, Joey;

dey's wabin' a welcome t' dey mammy—Joey, doan yo' heah de music—hol' me jes' a li'l' longah. Joey, kaze et am gittin' da'k now, but fuddah on, I sees de light comin'—comin'—closer an' closer, Joey. Now et am heah—it am heah! Ma'se—Missus—comin' ! Kiss me, Joey, onct mo' !

“ Yas, Lawd, I'se comin' ! Hab de crown ready fo' I'se comin' dar wha' dah am no sorrah—no mo' pain—no mo' hungah !

“ I feels de li'l' ahms ob my chillun 'bout my nec'—'by—Miss—Mantie—'by—Ma'se Canfiel'—'by, Joey ! 'By t' yo' all ! ”

With a smile of infinite trust resting upon her worn features, her arms relaxed, and the soul took its flight into the Unknown.

* * * * *

The last rays of the sun glinted across the cedar brakes of Rock Creek, and left an amber-tinted glow upon the woodland.

Mantie was nearing her ancestral home, and with her husband, could see the old homestead nestling in its setting of green.

The low rambling house was aglow with the glory of departing day, and the open portals gave them a mute welcome. The wide veranda, the spacious rooms, the garden, the broad acres of her inheritance were before them, and a smile of perfect peace rested upon the lovely face of the young matron.

That evening as they were seated on the wide veranda, looking at the silvery radiance of the moonlight as it was filtered through the majestic trees, Mantie looked up at the azure dome of night, and whispered :

“My poor guardian! May his weary soul find rest beyond the clouds!”

THE END.

